

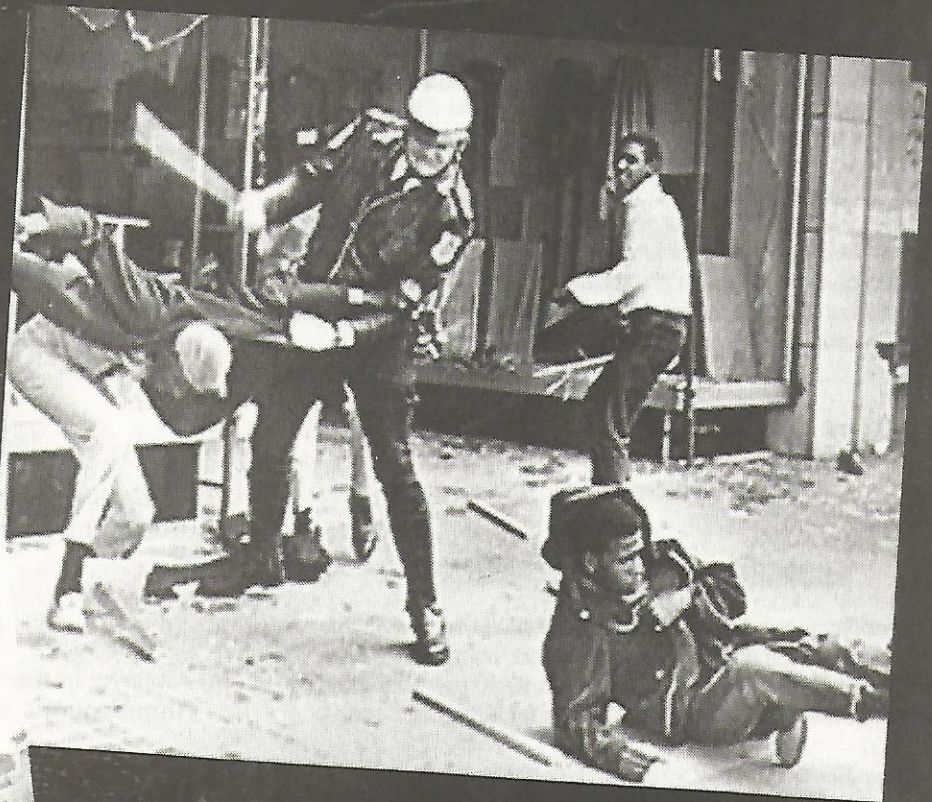
# THE NORTHEASTERN ANARCHIST

Theoretical Magazine of the Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists

Issue #6 Summer/Fall 2003

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ON  
THE



INTERSECTIONS  
OF RACE  
AND CLASS



# THE NORTHEASTERN ANARCHIST

*The Northeastern Anarchist* is the English-language theoretical magazine of the Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists (NEFAC), covering class struggle anarchist theory, history, strategy, debate and analysis in an effort to further develop anarcho-communist ideas and practice. Articles published here do not necessarily represent the collective viewpoint of the federation unless otherwise noted.

The Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists (NEFAC) is a bi-lingual (French and English) organization of revolutionaries from the northeastern region of North America who identify with the communist tradition within anarchism. The federation is organized around the principles of theoretical and tactical unity, collective responsibility and federalism. Our activities include study and theoretical development, anarchist agitation and propaganda, and participation within the class struggle.

As anarcho-communists, we struggle for a classless, stateless and non-hierarchical society. We envision an international confederation of directly democratic, self-managed communities and workplaces; a society where all markets, exchange value wage systems and divisions of labor have been abolished and the means of production and distribution are socialized in order to allow for the satisfaction of needs, adhering to the communist principle: "From each according to ability, to each according to need."

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# CLASS AND RACE:

## Burning Questions, Unpopular Answers

by Fruttidurruti

### EXCUSE THE CLASSISM

Do class and race oppressions exist parallel to each other and as dominating forces exclusive of each other? Is one oppression more important to take on and resist than the other? Is it possible for either to effectively "trump" another? Or are these forces inextricably linked and intertwined? Do we perceive them to even be equal forms of domination - dual forces that compliment each other in order to maintain rule by any given regime to be met with the same resistance...and not as one that excuses the other?

I'd like to argue that racism is an excuse. It's an abstract form of perception that is used as a tool. I'd like to argue that classism can be a way of thinking as well, but class is by all means a concrete action in itself. To hold onto class rule, the ruling class must maintain its own power. The fact that a ruling class "is" is directly related to what it does, whereas there can be a ruling class completely made up of one race, but the fact that the race exists at all, isn't inextricably linked to what that race does. The job of any ruling class is to maintain its own privilege by actively and systematically controlling how production and consumption is maintained and distributed. The capitalist ruling class does this because they're in the business of being rich, not racist.

White supremacy is a specific kind of racism that is directly related (but not exclusively) to how the U.S. ruling class divides the working class through forms of domestic policies. It definitely is central to how U.S. capital functions currently, and is a direct result of the factors that went into how European colonizers invaded the land that is now the U.S. Throughout the history of the United States, racism has been used as a social, cultural, political weapon to excuse atrocities committed through acts of genocide and slavery. The strug-

gles of the people whose race has defined their class because of colonial domination in the U.S. helped shape the attitudes of racial separation within the working class as a whole. I would argue that since the civil rights movements of the 1960's certain races such as African-Americans have become unraveled in their exclusive ties to their class. Since that era, there has been an emerging African-American middle class in the U.S. Although they hardly constitute a majority of the race, this growing class is a reflection of how U.S. white supremacy can and will change like a chameleon in order to meet the reshaping race and class struggles and movements for change.

Another historical situation I'd like to point out is how white supremacy in the U.S. has adapted around the turn of the 20th century to account for immigration from southern and eastern European countries. Poles, Hungarians, Bohemians and other unwanted peoples were NOT considered "white" when they arrived to work poor shit jobs in the States. Before them, Irish immigrants held onto class privilege on par with African-Americans at the time. Over time the U.S. ruling class saw the potential in "Americanizing" them, in other words, teaching them English, giving them educational classes, and investing in their communities in order to prop up their racial status to "white." What this really meant was that the ruling class was creating the illusion that these new immigrants' nationalities were of no use anymore, and in fact they had, as a people, more in common with the current Western-European settlers in their class, then they did with the African, Chinese, and Indigenous peoples of their class. This is an example of class domination reshaping its racial policies and attitudes domestically to fit in with their strategy of class domination.

Finally, I'd like to take a look at other colonized lands that fell victim to European

invasion, such as the lands that are now considered Mexico. The Spaniards that invaded the indigenous peoples, and colonized their lands, went on to take on unusual class contradictions. After 500 years, the Latino working class, that is actually made up of a majority of Spanish-speaking descendents of those invading Spaniards, now hold a relatively nebulous class status with the indigenous peoples of what is now Mexico, but hold less class privilege than the African-American working class of the U.S.! Even when Mexican workers attempt to emigrate to the U.S., they are treated as alien, and as an invading workforce by ALL of the races within the U.S. working class, as a result of reactionary class analysis.

These are examples that help point to two major conclusions:

(1) The class privilege of any given race within any given state, has the ability to change with different economic, social, and political factors, whether by the hands of the capitalist ruling class itself, or even by the shaping trends of struggles by any given race, nationality, or collaboration of them. This means that class privilege has the potential to be directly related to and the result of the racial status of any given peoples, but isn't fundamentally always directly related.

(2) In order for us to understand class struggle and its relationship to race, we absolutely need to think internationally. We need to take into account that race and class interact in unlimited and ever-changing ways throughout the world. If we are to settle on a position concerning racism exclusive to whatever state we live in, our analysis and our actions will be always limited to the borders of the state itself. This is no way to build a movement that will destroy racism and create a classless, stateless society worldwide!



## A CHALLENGE TO FELLOW 'ANARCHISTS OF COLOR'

When people call me a "class reductionist," I beam, because it's true! But when I talk about the working class in the United States or about "class war," I am talking about race as well. Building a movement internationally to organize for class struggle is an anti-racist movement. When I speak or write about the liberation of the working class, I'm assumed to be talking about the white working class here in the U.S. This assumption is wrong, white anarchists, as well as my fellow anarchists of color are perpetrators of this presumption.

First off, when I speak of the working class, I'm talking about the international working class, which is made up of a huge majority of people that are NOT of European descent.

Secondly, when I'm talking about the working class in the United States, I'm very clear about the fact that a large majority of African-Americans, Latin peoples, indigenous or "First Nation" peoples, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Arab-Americans, etc. are working class, working poor, migrant workers, unemployed, homeless, on welfare, incarcerated, and single mothers left to raise their children alone and not be paid for their social labor... and so are many people of European descent.

My point is, in order for us to understand how racism interacts with class, and how capitalism, statism, and racism work together to confuse us, we need to critically look at not only how we shape our analysis according to what is, but also according to what kind of movement will win for all working class people

who are facing the brutality of capitalism. There are levels of oppression that people face in many different ways, whether faced with a pink slip from work, an eviction notice from a landlord or a police baton to the head. All of these are directly related to how the international ruling class administers its control.

I'd like to focus this part of the essay on engaging in a critique regarding the emerging 'anarchist of color' movement in the United States.

Currently, within the anarchist movement in North America, I believe race is largely spoken about in three contexts when strategizing ways to organize effectively. Sometimes these strategies overlap, and they're sometimes used as alternatives to the others' inability to work the way folks thought they would.

One context is the dialogue about the need for the largely white North American anarchist movement to focus on "bringing in people of color" in order to create a sort of recruitment process within a white-dominated movement. You know, the classic tokenizing strategy.

Let me just say that this is a disgusting practice, that is not only ineffective, but largely a classist and racist way of addressing problems of racism in organizing. It reeks of liberalism, practically taking on a kind of "affirmative action," in order for white anarchists to overcome their culture of guilt. It assumes a strategy that all "people of color" want to join "their" movement. Or that people of color aren't already organizing in our own respective communities. I don't see this happening as much as it did some years ago, but the new practices are also looking pretty grim.

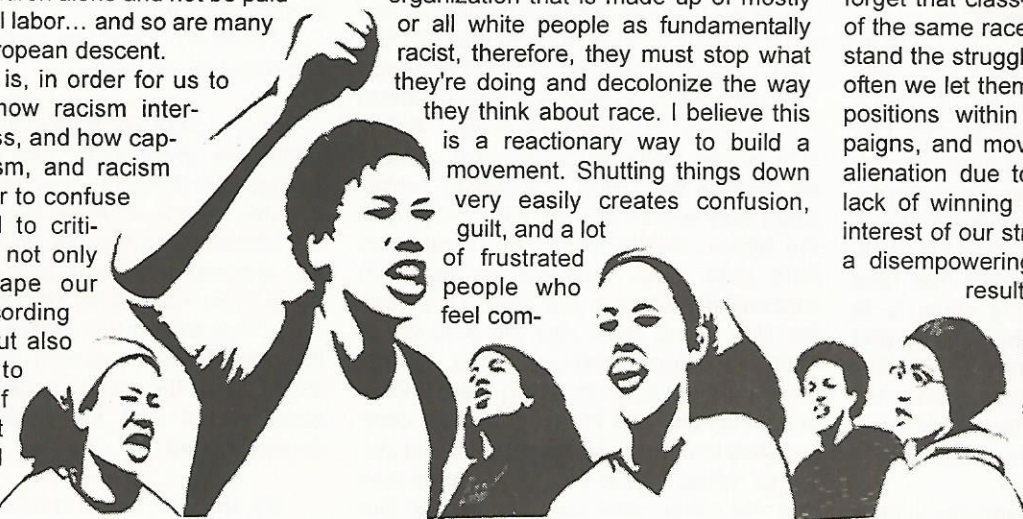
Another current strategy is to brand an organization that is made up of mostly or all white people as fundamentally racist, therefore, they must stop what they're doing and decolonize the way they think about race. I believe this is a reactionary way to build a movement. Shutting things down very easily creates confusion, guilt, and a lot of frustrated people who feel com-

"safe spaces" when meeting to discuss racism. We are fighting to win; we're not fighting to create exclusive meeting spaces that are perfect places that everyone should feel comfortable in. I believe anarchism is about gaining concrete goals, not about creating exclusive and ultimately imperfectable internal social relationships just so we can celebrate feeling good.

A third emerging anarchist practice in the United States, sometimes in response to the former ones, is to create a culture of "racial self-determination," in order for anarchists of different races to only organize within their own communities. While being an understandable reaction to create "safe space," and possibly an effective strategy to address racism by our European-American counterparts, this is a potentially dangerous way to organize.

I can't explain how many times I've heard middle class university-bred people of color take this stance, in order to justify knowing what "their" communities want. I'm not using this as a small example, this practice is rampant, and is an extremely classist attitude! While creating autonomous movements to build anti-racist struggle within "communities of color" we need to realize that we have the potential to forget that class-privileged people that are of the same races as us often don't understand the struggle of our communities, and often we let them take and hold leadership positions within our organizations, campaigns, and movements. This can lead to alienation due to class differences, a big lack of winning strategies that are in the interest of our struggling communities, and a disempowering reaction to our lack of results.

There's an overwhelming amount of class-privileged "people of color" spearheading this movement, creating a culture that is class reactionary to all working class people of all races in the United States. Many of these "activists" claim "self-determination" as an excuse to see their racial ties as what binds them exclusively to their race's community struggles. These people are also quick to react to what they see as "class trumping race," and find the common class struggle between people of different races to be not as important as what they share in common with the community in question. Often these "activists" hardly speak the same cultural language as the people they are



pelled to do nothing at all. This is also a kind of reaction that recognizes organizations for what they look like, and not for what they can do effectively. From my experience, most of the problems that all anarchists in the United States face are classist problems that are linked with racism. We need to understand and discuss race and class in a manner that both working class "white people" and "people of color" are involved inclusively. Often, I hear people refer to "comfort spaces" as



organizing, and many times, they can't relate to the experiences of the community they claim to represent.

## ANTI-RACIST STRUGGLE THROUGH COLLECTIVE RACIAL IDENTITY?

I'd like to now propose several critiques of what I see currently here in the United States - a new style of anti-racist anarchism being organized autonomously by 'anarchists of color'. Here are some obstacles I envision that we must overcome:

(1) The possibility of "people of color" becoming a new form of nationalism: the idea that people who aren't "white" should come together to build an autonomous space to organize in, because we share a common experience. This can be an empowering action in many ways, though it can present many problems. I believe different people experience racism in different ways, and it's one thing to share these experiences with other victims of racism, and to share resources, but to base a social movement solely on resisting racial oppression has a great chance at viewing capitalism through an exclusively racial lens.

(2) I also believe that the term 'people of color' to define us, is an attempt to counter "whiteness," in a reactionary way. We are defining ourselves in response to how the ruling class defines people of European descent as "white." Why, therefore, do we define ourselves as the counter to this lie? Whiteness only exists as an idea, which is a racist one at that. Why should we fall into the trap that capitalist propaganda, media, and colonizing education want us to? I also don't think the term 'people of color' takes into account people of mixed blood, or those non-Europeans who have light skin. We are folks who definitely experience racism as well, in different forms, and we don't fit the proposed definition. Besides, European-American people can be pretty colorful sometimes.

(3) Next, a movement of 'people of color' must not assume that only white people are capable of being racist. And I'm not just talking about people of different races thinking acting out against each other here in the United States, I also want to point out the brutal capitalist, fundamentalist, and State socialist regimes worldwide that use racism as a tool for the division of their country's respective working classes, and the international working class at large.

Many of these states are run by groups of people who aren't of European descent, and they do an excellent job of emphasizing racial divides between different races and nationalities within their respective countries and across the imaginary lines capitalists like to draw.

(4) Another foreseeable bump in the road is the chance that we'll continue to respond to a specific kind of white supremacy that is experienced here in the United States that is exclusive to the rest of the world. It's one thing to organize against the racism we experience locally or nationally, but we can't let this define how racism exists universally for people worldwide. In other words, if we aren't organizing with an internationalist focus, we're ultimately thinking along nationalist lines. We need to think and act locally as well as think and act globally (sound familiar?). The idea of "nationalism" comes from European theory anyway, so why should we define our boundaries the way those "bearded white guys" want us to?

(5) In recent years, our reaction to white anarchists has been, thus far, quite reactionary. We are quick to respond to what white anarchists do, or what they say, or what theories they use, and dispose of the actions they take in a way that assumes the actions themselves are European-influenced, and therefore fundamentally racist. This is bad. If a bunch of inexperienced and naive German cooks make a bad soup, does that mean that "making soup" itself is fundamentally linked to Germans, regardless of the fact that the problem lies with the failures of one group of German cooks? Does it mean Brazilians can't cook up some "good soup," or that "making soup" is what German cooks do, so Brazilians should avoid it altogether and make salad? Or that...any combination of groups of German and Brazilian cooks can't potentially work together to make kick-ass stew, or even a series of ten-course meals?

(6) I've heard anarchists of color conclude that we shouldn't "theorize" because that's what white anarchists do. I've mentioned "working class" to other anarchists of color, and have gotten some of the most classist responses I've ever heard. We, as 'anarchists of color' are not immune to being oppressors over white folks in certain ways, simply due to the fact that we face an institutionalized racism.

Do we continue to build an anti-racist struggle by organizing as people who

experience white racism? Is it our responsibility alone? Can we even do it alone, as victims of white supremacy? Is it possible for us to abolish racism without abolishing the ruling class?

I say no to all these questions. We must make our struggle against white supremacy a struggle against racism worldwide, and with those in our class, for a classless, stateless, anti-racist worldwide. I argue that this is the way in which we need to recognize how capitalism works, and I argue that it is the most strategic way to bring about a world free of capitalism.

## WHERE ARE WE GOING?

One of the major reasons I've committed so much space to criticizing how we, as 'anarchists of color' are organizing, is because it's vital that we discuss how we are moving forward with our theory and action. We aren't incapable of racist and classist ways of organizing, and we need to hold ourselves responsible to ensure that we don't start to believe we are unable to be self-critical, and/or be criticized by people of different races.

We need to think about how to win, and attempt to reach our short and long term goals. We need to create a culture(s) where we can discuss how different forms of oppression are interlinked in a manner that recognizes how they affect our actions. We need to do it frankly, honestly, and constructively. We should not be afraid to say what we feel, due to cultural restrictions that we manifest from our own failures to communicate in an engaging way already.

I'd like to recognize that I haven't even touched patriarchy as a form of oppression here, and how it relates to class and/or race. Hopefully we in NEFAC, and the anarchist movement at large, can work more to further develop organizational positions on how patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, chauvinism, and machismo divides our class, and further creates reactionary attitudes, actions, and culture within the working class. Maybe in a future NEA issue?

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# CLAIM NO EASY VICTORIES:

## An Anarchist Analysis of ARA and its Contributions to the Building of a Radical Anti-Racist Movement

by Rory McGowan

**1) WE GO WHERE THEY GO:** *Whenever fascists are organizing or active in public, we're there. We don't believe in ignoring them. Never let the nazis have the streets!*

**2) WE DON'T RELY ON THE COPS OR THE COURTS TO DO OUR WORK FOR US:** *This doesn't mean we never go to court. But we must rely on ourselves to protect ourselves and stop the fascists.*

**3) NON-SECTARIAN DEFENSE OF OTHER ANTI-FASCISTS:** *In ARA, we have lots of different groups and individuals. We don't agree about everything and we have the right to differ openly. But in this movement an attack on one is an attack on us all. We stand behind each other.*

**4) WE SUPPORT ABORTION RIGHTS AND REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM:** *ARA intends to do the hard work necessary to build a broad, strong movement against racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, discrimination against the disabled, the oldest, the youngest and the most oppressed people. WE INTEND TO WIN!*

### -Anti-Racist Action's 'Points of Unity'

The current climate of war and repression is foisting on us an urgent need to try and decipher what in hell is happening. Questions of capitalist restructuring and expansion, occupation, white supremacy, racism, white privilege and fascism are all topics being raised in anarchist circles. Questions, that are of the utmost importance in our developing of a fighting movement that can intervene in struggles that are breaking out, or soon will.

Without veering too far into negativity, it must be said that for much of the North American anarchist movement, we are short on theory and much of an analysis of historical conditions and developments. While there is growth and promise, we still have an uphill journey. Partly because the current anarchist movement is quite young in age and does not have a solid connection with any historical lineage - no institutions or infrastructure that we can claim some linear connection to, not much living history that is explicitly anarchist and maps out decisions or breaks made for the politi-

cal or social advancement of our groups and people in struggle. However, this isn't to say we haven't participated in any way or that were short on experience. Since the mid 1980's the North American anarchist scene/movement has been developing collectively and taking part in struggles that, when examined, can give lessons to build on. We are young, but we have been a part of many not-so-insignificant projects and battles. Looking back wards from recent direct action against the war, to the globalization protests, to political prisoner/prison abolition work, to Zapatista support, to further back with anti-apartheid work and solidarity with people of color and the oppressed, including Black and Native struggles, looking at this it is clear anarchists have sought to develop ourselves by learning from and being real participants in these many fights.

It is in these struggles that we can gage our success and failings, and with the formation of critical perspectives, applied and integrated into our work, we may be in better positions to identify, defend, and help generate more autonomous and potentially insurrectionary action.

For fourteen years the work of ARA has been to popularize the ideas of direct action in the fight against racism. Along the way ARA's own internal development has meant connecting racism to other struggles against oppression, from the pro-choice and anti-patriarchal organizing to pro-queer struggles to emphasizing the continual need for participation and initiative in political direction from young people. While there is no single, homogenous, ARA political line beyond ARA's 'Points of Unity', generally, ARA has and continues to be an anti-authoritarian arena for debate and action around the connectedness of various forms of oppression. This allows for an experimentation and self-activity essential

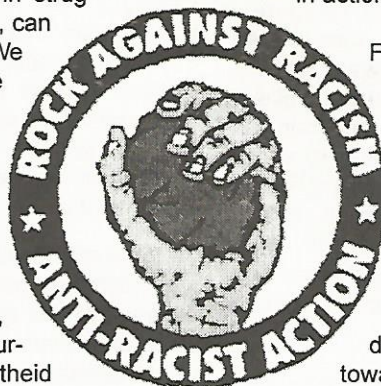
to the development of a conscious movement outside of the control and direction of the State. Constructing organizations and movements at the grassroots can be instructive in both the difficulties and simultaneously the radical potentials of people in action.

And that is what we need. From a revolutionary perspective, we need movements that can challenge peoples notions of what is possible and then sketch out in our heads what its going to take to make our endeavors succeed. Is ARA such a movement? Is the work done by ARA building towards an actual radical opposition movement? Is that even the

intention of ARA? After fourteen years what has ARA's contribution been? And what has been the contribution of anarchists within ARA? If we find in ARA the elements that are essential components of a movement capable of influencing the emergence of radical currents, is ARA up to the challenge of understanding and building on these elements.

These questions represent a kind of "ruler" that I think we size up ARA with, and provide a context for discussion. While I hope this article answers these questions, I am prepared to admit that it only scratches the surface and prompts more questions than it satisfies (but this isn't a bad thing). If ARA is to be relevant it's got to be constantly subjected to a critical assessment of its work, from outside and from within. And in regard to the broader discussion of where we revolutionary anarchists see organizing potentials and lessons to be learnt, then ARA may be as good a starting point then most anything our movement has been connected to.

To best access the impact ARA has had and what role it could play in the future, it could be helpful to look at its past and development. From starting as an organi-





zation of anti-racist Skinhead crews in the late 1980's, to remaking itself into a political movement of nearly two thousand during the mid 1990's, and ending with the current period of the ARA movements life.

## FIGHT THE REAL ENEMY! FIGHT THE POWER!

ARA originally came out of the efforts of Minneapolis anti-racist skinheads to create an organization that could combat the presence of nazi skinheads in their city and its neighboring city, St. Paul. The Baldies, a multi-racial skinhead crew having members of black, white, Asian, and Native American origins, was fighting the Nazi skinhead group, the White Knights, and had set a code within the local punk and skinhead scenes: if Baldies came upon White Knights at shows, in the streets downtown, or wherever, the nazis were warned once. If Baldies came across the nazis again, then the nazis could expect to be attacked, or served some of what the Baldies called "Righteous Violence."

While the Baldies actions went a long way to limiting the presence and organizing efforts of nazis in the Twin Cities areas, the Baldies realized that a successful drive against the nazis would mean having to form a broader group that appealed to kids other than just Skins; ARA was that group. However, the attempt to make ARA into a group beyond the Baldies was met with limited success, and ARA remained predominantly skinhead.

But the experience of the Baldies was not limited to Minneapolis alone. Across the Midwest, nazi activity was growing and anti-racist Skinheads were organizing in similar ways to what the Baldies had done. Soon, these different anti-racist skinhead crews were meeting up with each other and deciding to create a united organization of anti-racist skinhead crews. ARA as a name was adopted and a brief network of the crews was formed: the Syndicate.

Like Minneapolis, Chicago had multi-racial crews. These ARA skins were generally left-wing sympathetic and in Chicago it was not uncommon to find some Skins warming to Black liberation/Nationalist ideas. And it was not just racist and nazi ideas that were confronted. The Chicago ARA crew banned the wearing of American flags patches on jackets on bomber jackets (a standard piece of the Skin attire). At this point in time this was a rather significant step in Skinhead circles. While many Skinheads could claim to be "anti-racist", a

vast majority also were ProAmS (Pro American Skins). It was generally unheard of to find whole crews of Skinheads rejecting patriotic trappings. Many ARA skins took their cue from the words of groups like Public Enemy, America was a racist nightmare and the Stars and Stripes a symbol for, "...a land that never gave a damn."

The success of ARA could be found in its being a truly organic product of a youth culture. Young people, in this example Skinheads, were creating a group that was explicitly anti-racist and sought to confront and shut out the nazi presence in the scenes specifically and the cities generally. ARA as an idea was made a pole to rally around and as an actual body of people it fought for "turf" and the establishment of a type of hegemony - lines were drawn and you had to choose where you stood. From putting on music shows, to producing zines and literature, to holding conferences where people could meet up and hang out while simultaneously trying to build an actual political project capable of fighting and winning.

However, ARA had many weaknesses that would lead to this initial incarnation having to be "reformed." ARA was at this point predominantly male, and despite the growing political consciousness and understanding that ARA needed to be more than just a Skinhead group, the emphasis placed on physical confrontation and violence often breed a mentality where in the end, ARA was only about beating down the nazis. Larger political concerns became subordinate to the internal scene life. Women in the ARA groups saw double standards. While emphasis was placed on combating the oppression of racism, sexism ran rampant. Several women would leave ARA to look for a politic that dealt more fundamentally with Patriarchy. Some left in plain disgust at the macho behavior of some ARA men. Other women decided to stay in the movement and challenge the behavior and attempt to integrate radical and feminist ideas into the core politics of ARA. The decision by these women to stay was based on the realization that there were few other organizations existing that were as radical and militant. ARA had managed to attract a number of dedicated and determined individuals and this encouraged the idea that it was possible to develop an anti-sexist vision.

ARA helped expand peoples understanding of politics and oppression but the sword is double edged, and the new political consciousness worked to illustrate the limita-

tions of this first incarnation of ARA. ARA needed to grapple with its internal contradictions if it was to develop into the broad, militant anti-racist youth organization and movement it originally hoped to be.

## THE CHOICE OF A NEW GENERATION...

From '88 to '90 ARA had spread throughout the Midwest United States and was even seeing some West coast groups spring up. However, by 1991 the Minneapolis grouping represented the most consistent and in many ways the more diverse and politically engaged group, this was made possible in part by ARA's relationship with revolutionary anarchist groups like the RABL (Revolutionary Anarchist Bowling League). Despite the somewhat silly name, RABL had a rep for being extremely confrontational and solidly pro-class war anarchist. Some of the members of ARA and the Baldies were involved with RABL and hoped to bring anarchist politics into ARA's program.

While keeping the militancy and uncompromising attitude that ARA had been built on, anarchists in ARA made efforts to address the weakness that had run through ARA earlier. Attention to Queer struggles, Patriarchy, imbalance of power between whites and people of color, were all issues thrown to the fore now.

ARA Minneapolis was trying to turn itself into a popular, anti-authoritarian direct action group. Institutionalized oppressions of class society were given as much priority to thought and action as the continued struggle against nazi organizing. From police brutality to anti-war activity to actions to defend abortion clinics, ARA was a much more dynamic organization and this aided in its recruitment of new militants.

ARA had ceased to be a group centered around Skinhead culture, and while the limited potential of ARA's first wave had been overcome, problems would still plague the group. Understanding class, gender, sexual definition and internal sexism would continue to be a challenge for ARA. By 1993, ARA in Minneapolis had reached a stage where after an extremely intense and inwardly focused grappling with group and individual identity, ARA almost totally fell apart and for the next year ARA remained dormant. It was now in Canada that ARA would find its strength.



## ON THE PROWL AND IN THE STREETS

Toronto ARA was formed in 1992 as a response to a rise in nazi activity in the city. Arson, vandalism, and physical attacks were being carried out by fascists. Made up of anti-prison activists, native/indigenous organizers, anti-racists, anarchists, and kids from the local punk and skinhead scenes, ARA went to work to challenge and shutdown the fascists.

At this point the main organization of fascists in Toronto was the Heritage Front (HF). Founded by long time neo-nazi and KKK organizers, the HF was attempting to bring the different nazi tendencies together under its banner. The most well known of these fascist groups was the pre-Matt Hale COTC (Church of the Creator) which served as the "muscle" to the HF's political rhetoric.

Through the work done by ARA in the States and its promotion in the radical anti-imperialist press, Love and Rage's newspaper, and the punk scenes many publications (in particular magazines like MRR and Profane Existence), ARA as a name and model seemed to be the best avenue for organizing a grass roots, militant, and independent anti-racist project.

Like previous ARA organizing, emphasis was put on creating a visible culture through music shows, literature, and mass in your face demonstrations. ARA Toronto was having organizing meetings of over a hundred and their demos were in the several of hundreds. Toronto ARA quickly became a successful campaign and it's establishment in youth scenes and areas of Toronto like Kensington Market made it impossible for fascists to carry out their activity openly. ARA proceeded to go after the HF leadership and held "outings", instead of organizing boring demos with speakers talking to the wind, ARA mobilized to march on the homes and hangouts of the nazis.

While previous incarnations of ARA had envisioned themselves moving towards a broad youth oriented style of organizing, it was Toronto ARA which really illustrated the potentials for ARA to do just that. The support and interest ARA created in less than a year's time was seen when an anti-HF demo in downtown Toronto in January of 1993 drew over 500 anti-racists who were going to prevent HF members from marching through the streets. The ARA contingent was attacked by police on horse back, with some ARA members being arrested for assaulting police.

Despite the attack, ARA found the demo an overall success. The demo sought to shut down the nazi march and it did that, but it went further and showed ARA as an organization uninterested in playing the games of established liberal "anti-racist" and left groups. ARA knew that direct action was a more powerful force than lobbying for State action or selling papers - two things which will never stop racist and fascist organizing.

The success, and draw towards, ARA's work would soon catch the attention of larger political Left groups. Organizations like the IS (International Socialist) tried to enter into ARA, but after a period of a couple months were voted out by a 2/3 majority. However, ARA now a known force and center for militant youths and activists would be sought out more and more for joint actions and Left groups would try and place themselves into a position of "leadership" within ARA, this especially with the formation of the ARA Network in 1995.

## WE GO WHERE THEY GO

In 1995 several different groups came together to discuss creating a united front of various independent anti-racist forces. ARA had reemerged in Minneapolis and met with members of the MAFNet (Midwest Antifascist Network), an ARA type group that contained several Left tendencies from anarchists to smaller Marxist groups like the Trotskyist League to older SDS veterans.

After much debate, the new body would be called the Anti-Racist Action Network, and would be held together by the 'Points of Unity' (POU). Any individual could participate in a chapter so long as they agreed to the POU (although, different chapters could have additional political points of unity, reflecting the specific groups political orientation. This would later cause trouble where one groups POU would be taken as the Networks). Strategically, it brought in a larger mass of people and could be a vehicle for taking direct action and democratic left ideas of organizing to a higher level. The new ARA Net was also genuine in its not being a front for any one political group.

Utilizing internal discussion bulletins, national meetings, having a delegate system to facilitate decision making between the different chapters, ARA Net represented something new and fresh. And it also was an overwhelmingly anti-authoritarian organization. A sizable segment of the

membership identified as anarchist and were now in a position to argue for anarchist models of organizing. There was no other movement that was currently existing that saw anarchists in a position to define avenues of action.

Anarchists involved with Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation worked within ARA to keep the organizations structure and aims transparent and participatory. Love and Rage, as an organization, viewed ARA as a potential mass movement (e.g.: SDS), where politics could be raised and debated and where through practice and constant analysis win people to more and more radical positions. The relationship between the different political tendencies was often rocky, and there was constant debate around the setting up of different committees and how much influence they would have. Other issues of contention were the ability of organizations to join ARA en masse. ARA Net was set up on a chapter basis, and each chapter was made up of individuals. No organization could just join ARA Net. Chapters could have its members coming from any tendency, but a specific organization could hold no sway beyond the number of chapters their members were apart of. And even then each chapter was allowed only two votes. This made it difficult for Left sects to hijack ARA for opportunistic interests.

The next several years saw hundreds of activists join up with ARA. Network annual conferences could easily see 500 in attendance and conference weekends would be a mix of both decision making plenary and educational workshops with topics ranging from anti-Prison work to Colonialism to State repression to developments in the Far Right movements.

But the life's blood of ARA remained its action in the streets. The following years from '96 to '98 provided ARA militants the greatest chance of demonstrating the politics of the movement on a much more mass level. But this period would also emerge as the most difficult period in ARA's life. From accountability, to the need for a more coherent analysis of race, class and gender, these issues along with the ever present need to struggle against sexism, patriarchy and internal power imbalances would come to dominate the movement unlike at any time previously. Internal conflicts would split ARA at the seams and it would take the pulse of the new protest movements erupting in Seattle '99 to give help ARA a new focus and energy.



## LET THE BATTLE BEGIN

Newspapers were scrambling for info on the new street militants and their ideology of anarchism, debate started to rage in the radical press. The Black Bloc was seen by some as misled youth, interested only in adventurism. Sometimes the Black Bloc was condemned outright and treated as criminal - an attitude that rolled in from the established Left. During riots, liberal and leftists do-gooders actually tried to defend capitalist property from the anarchists. In several instances, avowed 'pacifists' have attacked the Black Bloc in an effort to protect places like the Gap and Starbucks.

The actions by the Black Bloc and anarchists turned traditional politics on its head... ARA groups quickly defended the Seattle Black Bloc, seeing a similarity in tactics and motivation - also in the way that militant anti-fascism had suffered from the denunciations by the established left and liberal reformists.

The Seattle events had an immense effect on the ARA movement. ARA, like many groups, was taken by surprise when the Battle of Seattle erupted. The profound change the demonstrations had on political discourse and life itself could hardly have been foreseen. In ARA, there had long been debate about expanding our role and focus beyond the most basic anti-racist organizing. Many saw ARA as a grassroots direct action, anti-racist, anti-Nazi, and for many ARA'ers, anti-cop movement. But explicit anti-capitalism was never taken up as a whole. Within several individual chapters this would have been probable, mostly in the anarchist dominated groups in Minneapolis, Detroit (two cities that also had L&R members as active ARA organizers) and Chicago. But within ARA, there were tendencies that saw adopting more explicit politics as potentially detrimental to ARA. Seattle helped to turn this around.

But this gets too far ahead, it is important to first outline the pre-Seattle ARA period and raise what events were fueling its growth and significance.

Throughout the Midwestern United States, Klan groups were on the offensive and holding blatantly provocative mass rallies that could attract hundreds of supporters. The Klan and assorted neo-Nazi allies were pinpointing cities that were faced with tinderbox-like racial tension. Fights around affirmative action, welfare, police brutality, housing, continued school de-segregation practice, or any struggle that brought about conflicts that poised people of color against

the interests of White Supremacy in either its institutionalized form or autonomous actions by White citizens, the Klan would use as an opportunity to polarize the debate and saw their numbers and influence grow. Klan groups, like the one lead by longtime KKK member and neo-Nazi Tom Robb, became seen as fighters for White "rights."



*ARA and NEFAC join forces to confront neo-nazis in Lewiston, ME; January 11, 2003*

From Cincinnati, Ohio to Ann Arbor, Michigan, the Klan started holding its demos but the effect was that thousands of counter demonstrators came out to vent their disapproval and hatred of the racists. In some of these cities the smoldering racial tension that had long been present was about to be ignited. It was this counter-organizing that became the main thrust of the ARA Network. Doing pre-rally agitating, trying to meet up with sympathetic groups, and boldly stating that the aim of it's counter-protesting was to "shut down" the rallies, ARA established itself as the group that rolled out to force the racists to take flight. In particular, there was a massive riot that erupted when the Robb Klan faction came under attack from Black residents and ARA'ers in Ann Arbor. Police attacked the crowd using tear gas. Several Klansmen and fascists were wounded by protesters. Six years later, that riot is still talked about in Ann Arbor, partly due to continued legal issues brought on by the subsequent arrest of dozens of anti-racists charged with inciting and participating in mob action and assault. The arrests came two months after the Ann Arbor action, when at another Klan rally in Kalazamoo, Michigan, police using both video tape and statements made by "peace" marshals, identified several activists. The "peace" marshals, whose

ranks were comprised of mostly older male Trade Unionists, had seen their influence and authority at the Ann Arbor rally ignored and undermined - they had been unable to prevent anti-Klan protesters from (un)peacefully taking matters into their own hands. While Ann Arbor was seen as a victory for anti-racists, the later arrests seriously demoralized many ARA'ers and showed

that ARA was not completely ready for the repercussions of its activity. Many arrested activists felt let down and unsupported. The combination of high legal costs and the potential of lengthy jail time left many activists feeling alone and insufficiently supported. Even more, without a solid political understanding of how these actions were part of a

broader strategy, it is easy to see how the stress could make some question the relevance of what ARA was doing. There were cases of activists asking why they were risking so much for a few hours of street fighting. This is a real concern that should not be discounted.

Many radicals in ARA could point to the significance of the mass action: sharpening political differences and solidifying existing positions, generating spontaneous organizing and/or the need to quickly reassess plans, the coming together of comrades and new groups of people, and polarizing the mass of the protesters against the police and government officials who would be spending time and money to allow the racists to rally. For anarchists, this atmosphere provided opportunities to speak and agitate for more radical positions and actions while simultaneously supporting steps being taken by folks from the communities who were operating outside of any political formation and sought to work in ways that directly went against government or community "leaderships" sanctioned plans and conduct. Out of these actions, connections and dialogue could be had about what the needs of the communities are, beyond these one time explosions of anti-racist action. For anarchists, an assessment of the confidence and abilities of our



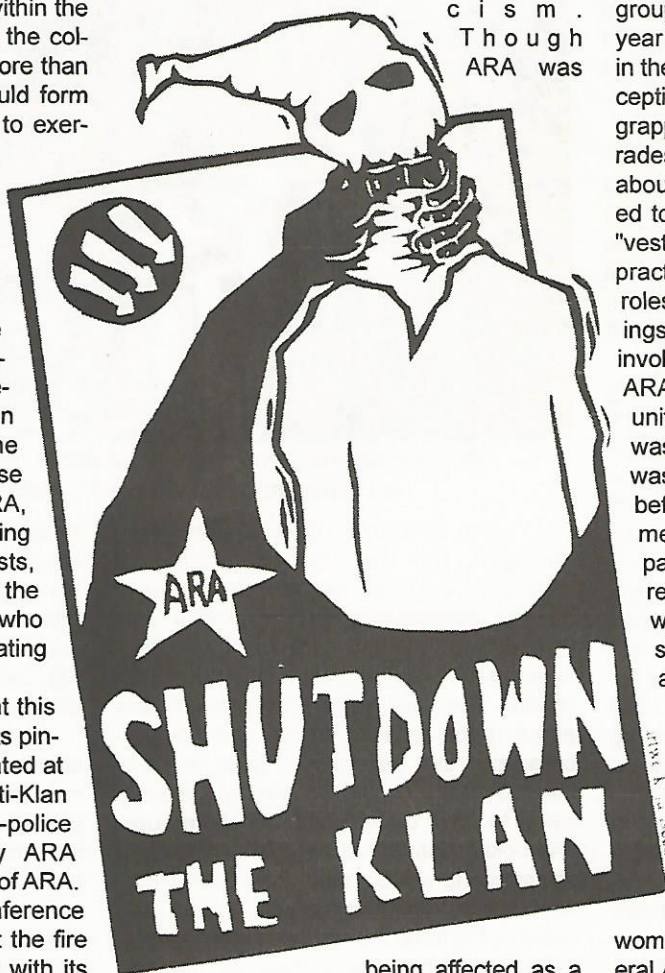
forces could be made. Anarchist revolutionaries wanted to spread and popularize ARA, but personal and group development was equally important. This process of developing a nuclei, or cadre, of fighters is an important point of militant, extra-legal activity.

The ability of a movement like ARA to resist the emergence of a centralized, top-down structure where there would be a minority determining the politics and the strategy, would be found though the widest possible discussion and planning within the various ARA circles, and stressing the collective process. It happened on more than one occasion that one person would form an ARA group and would attempt to exercise ownership over it. Others who would come into the group would feel as if their opinions and work were subordinate to a few who may have greater economic resources or social influence. As with any growing movement, the result was an attraction of individuals who sought to use the movement for their own ends, rather than making ARA the property of the whole of the membership. These groups did not last long within ARA, but they had the effect of alienating many new and enthused activists, including women, who felt some of the ARA locals were controlled by men who were interested in women for dating purposes more than as comrades.

It should be emphasized that at this time (1996-97), ARA had reached its pinnacle in membership, easily estimated at 1,500 supporting activists. The anti-Klan organizing and a number of anti-police brutality campaigns initiated by ARA groups had helped swell the ranks of ARA. But in 1998 at the ARA national conference several internal conflicts would put the fire to ARA and test its ability to cope with its own weakness'. A series of accounts from women of having been treated in abusive and demeaning ways, and one woman ARA activist having been sexual assaulted by a male involved in ARA, lead to a major split. Local ARA groups collapsed into different factions and individual members would sometimes side with particular split off factions in other cities, depending on who knew who. At the core of this was the fact that several women felt that their concerns and struggles against sexism were being ignored or undermined by their own male "comrades". Women were told to not bring their personal issues to the meetings and long standing cases of blatant male

chauvinism were discounted as having been exaggerated by women to suit their private interests. ARA's movement structure had little in terms of a plan of resolution. ARA existed as a loose network centered around the POU, and mechanisms of accountability and action to solve internal disputes and problems of such high and sensitive degree were not present. A few activists intimately connected to the situation used this unfortunate

truth to evade criticism. Though ARA was



being affected as a whole, individuals directly involved (or who had sided with certain persons who were being accused of sexism and misconduct) would say that the matters were of local concern and that they were uninterested in Network involvement, despite several women contacting ARA groups and individuals in other cities asking for help because the local group would not deal with, and in effect would try and mute, the issues.

Attempts at mediation failed and ARA left its annual conference splintered and demoralized. Several local groups never regained momentum and others who outwardly appeared strong would themselves come crashing inwards. Most notable was

the split in the ARA affiliated RASH UNITED (Red & Anarchist Skinheads) who split into East Coast and Midwest factions, and ultimately ceased all together (a Canadian RASH in Quebec continued but was more thoughtful and committed to group accountability than many of its American counterparts). Once again cases of sexism and un-accountability by a mostly male membership caused implosion.

While the next year did not see ARA groups stop their organizing, it was a rough year and introspection on the part of many in the movement slowed down outward perceptions of action. It was crucial for ARA to grapple with its limitations, and many comrades worked tirelessly to open up debate about what had happened and what needed to change: how groups formed or were "vested" into the ARA Net, structures and practice for resolution, rotating Network roles, and attempting to hold more gatherings where internal network life and issues involving its members could be discussed. ARA would remain a network of chapters united around the Points of Unity, but it was smaller and the level of discourse was more intense and productive than before. If ARA was to continue as a movement, then a higher commitment on the parts of its overall membership was required and a realization that a few words of who it was or some mechanical structural adjustments would not be adequate. Emphasizing political quality over membership numbers was what the movement needed.

Even current internal strategy planning and political discussions have been influenced by this introspection started a few years back. Drawing out experiences within ARA combined with developing theories of women in society and our movements, several ARA chapters have tried to draw more attention to the need for anti-patriarchal organizing and political prioritizing. The Chicago ARA group (which found its beginnings firmly rooted in clinic defense and exposing far-right ties to the anti-abortion movements) is one chapter that has tried to integrate a more serious women's focus into its work. With a recent ARA conference held this past April, and the fact that several committed and longtime ARA activists are women and continue acting as "responsibles," ARA will be hosting a women's conference towards the end of summer to continue to elevate anti-patriarchal politics to the front of direct action, and anti-fascist, organizing.

But moving back to Seattle. It was at this

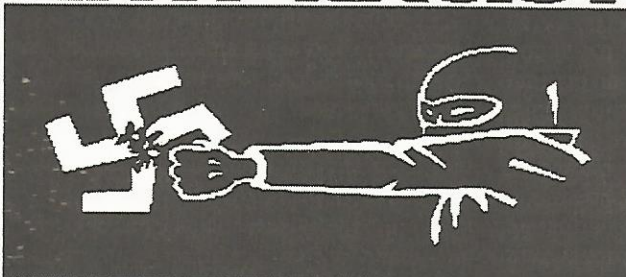


time that several ARA affiliates re-grouped and started to organize, building off of their connections and history of direct action. Seattle was a moment that lit up peoples imaginations and many ARA groups that were still active threw themselves into the various mass protests. Seattle, Washington DC, Cincinnati, and Quebec City saw numerous ARA militants participating in the protests' planning and actions. While internal debates over anti-capitalism and ARA's adoption of this as a unifying politic continued, the majority of ARA supported the organizing and saw issues of "globalization" intrinsically connected to larger struggles around race, gender, and class inequality. Another point for ARA to organize around was the increased attraction the "anti-globalization" movement was having for far-right and neo-fascist groups. It was here that work by smaller ARA groups took shape. More theoretical works were developed to analyze ARA's activity and the emerging social movements - from advancements and tactics in State repression to the needs of social and more specifically, revolutionary left - to build on current battles with the State and resist co-option or destabilization, to the influence the new movement was having on other areas of struggle. Mass protest and the increased connectedness movements had with one another via internet and these series of mass demos helped expand possibilities for quick mobilization and affinity that had in the past been established less frequently and taken a greater period of time to develop.

But ARA's orientation was not to be defined solely by its relationship to the anti-globalization movement. ARA had for years been struggling against racism and fascist organizing. Many Klan groups saw their rallies cease as they suffered from their own internal power struggles, State infiltration/repression, and having ARA outmaneuver them on many occasions, by successfully mounting campaigns to build effective street and community resistance. But new fascist organizing, lead by more sophisticated and potentially dangerous fascist movements, started to emerge. In the days following the 9/11 attacks, the National Alliance started a campaign to build on white people's insecurities and fears. ARA participated in defense of Mosques and Arab centers. Struggles to fight the tightening of immigration laws, the rising number of cases of detentions and deportations of immigrants, and the general racist backlash, were all areas that ARA activists found themselves involved in. Yet the rapidly changing circum-

stances of 9/11 and the escalation of Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq made it difficult for much of the Left and progressive forces to get a stable footing. The US State was quickly moving to inact stauncher repression

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measures that were geared towards silencing protest with fear and intimidation. More concerning, they may potentially be launching a campaign of infiltration and encapsulation wherein the State may actually direct the activity and political trajectory of a group or movement by utilizing moles and dis-information. The authorities were now working overtime to curb outbreaks of militant action.

### IN CONCLUSION

A recent article entitled "Revolutionary Anti-Fascism," published in NEFAC's agitational magazine Barricada, posed several questions about ARA. While it praised ARA's commitment to organizing street level defense against racist attacks and fascist groups, where most of the Left fails miserably, the article is critical of ARA's continued lack of developing positions on a range of issues: patriarchy, white supremacy, class, and even fascism. The article is important and I sympathize notably with its emphasizing that ARA needs to seriously grapple with political questions and commit itself to a higher level of debate, whether or not there is immediate agreement. Where I disagree with the article is that beyond articulating radical anti-fascist positions it sees ARA's main contribution in the past and future as its anti-fascist organizing, anti-fascist organizing that is based more times than not on straight-forward anti-nazi activity. A point the article makes is that where there is no visible or active nazi presence, ARA groups fall into a state of inactivity. This has become an unfortunate reality for a lot of ARA groups and shows an inability to connect anti-racism with other struggles beyond the pale of nazi activity.

Anti-nazi action is important, but like past ARA attempts to attack inequality and oppression in the interconnected realms of race, gender, and class exploitation, current ARA activists would do well to connect

with developments in their cities, communities, schools and workplaces. Sorry for the run on sentence, but the main point here is that anti-fascist politics should be a lens threw which we view class society as a whole. It is a critique of power and anti-human tendencies and its incorporation coupled with a willingness to fight and utilize direct action in whatever arena we are struggling in, may help to develop the nec-

cessary mass movements capable of breaking down our societys rule of exploitation and division.

I chose the title "Claim No Easy Victories" to point out that ARA has been an essential fighting movement in North American radical politics. Its success in mobilizing and politicizing hundreds of activists can not be ignored. Current organizing by anarchists would look vastly different if ARA had not exploded into the scenes, or had ceased when difficulties arose. However, while significant advancements have been the result of ARA organizing - the development of anti-fascist politics, staunch defense of collective and decentralized organizing, the use of direct action and militancy in the face of a legalistic and pacifist Left, and the important defeats of various fascist organizing - ARA still has a long road ahead of itself, and it may be too easy to rest on what has been done thus far. Success is temporal and fleeting - the struggle continues...

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For more info on ARA, the book *Confronting Fascism*, and the women's summer conference hosted by ARA Chicago, contact: [ara\\_chicago@ziplip.com](mailto:ara_chicago@ziplip.com)

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# DEVELOPING A CROSS-RACE CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS:

## STRATEGIES FOR BTR AND NEFAC

*by the Sabate Collective*

The debate between NEFAC and the national organization forming as a result of the "Bring the Ruckus" (BTR) statement has raised many important questions for anarchists as we try to make sense of racism, both as a specifically "American" concept, and internationally. This article is intended to bring to the discussion our thoughts and to hopefully fill in important gaps, bring to light some inherent contradictions, and find some commonalities, both with the BTR articles and with the NEFAC articles.

We have found that while BTR attempts to address institutionalized white supremacy as a step towards bringing about social revolution, we feel that their strategy and theory falls short in a number of ways. Specifically, there is little correlation between their theory and goals (abolishing the white race) and their day-to-day strategies and work (Copwatch, prison abolition, etc.). Further, their reliance on a hierarchy of oppressions, placing race at the top, serves to oversimplify the discourse around social revolution and ignores important connections between patriarchy, race, class, and capitalism. We also take issue with all participants in the debate as they have forgotten one important detail - in order to discuss political theories, there needs to be some common vocabulary.

### DEFINITIONS

No one has spent any time trying to establish common definitions of "race," "racism," and "white supremacy." Obviously we do not purport to have the perfect definitions of these words, but in order to talk about these issues, we all need to be talking about the same thing. It is clear from the preceding articles that different authors are using different meanings. If we are to have a debate, we need to at least have some common understanding of what we are talking about.

Race is a socially constructed category

which changes in time, context and geographical location. The social construction of race is, for the most part formed by the ruling class and the changing definition of race has been dependant on social changes, such as the enlightenment, the rise of capitalism, colonization and chattel slavery in the Americas. These terms were created in a Western, American social reality and largely reflect this.

In the US, "race" is most commonly used to refer to skin color, but this is not always the an accurate use of the word. We can see historical examples of the racialization of white immigrants, such as the Irish, Scottish or Polish. As anarchists, we use the term "race" as a social construct, not as a denotation of skin color.

"Racism" is used in many different ways; the two we want to spend time distinguishing between are the more common liberal definition and a definition we view to be more radical and lends itself more to social change. The liberal definition of racism is found when any race or more appropriately any ethnic group has a social prejudice over any other social/ethnic group, regardless of socio-economic conditions. This definition leads us to the liberal rhetoric of "reverse racism." This liberal definition also fails to take into consideration institutionalized oppressions, historical racism, relies heavily on a vague concept of "education" as a method to end racism and feeds into American philosophies of meritocracy.

The radical definition is found using the "equation" of power plus prejudice equals racism. The radical definition understands that only those with privilege and power according to socio-economic conditions may in effect be racist and those that are oppressed can be affected by racism. This definition goes on further to state that social prejudices held by people of color are not "racist" but rather an expression of anger towards the white hegemony. These prejudices are also expressions of anger, misdirected towards other ethnic groups

who have been pitted against one another by institutions in power either in the US or in the case of recent immigrants, their home countries. This definition is also more readily applicable to other countries, as there is often dominant ethnic groups or religious groups that uses the racialization of minority ethnic group as basis for oppression (eg: the relationships between English and Irish, Anglophone Canadian and Francophone Canadian, Spanish-descendant Mexican and indigenous Mexicans, etc.). We largely agree with Ruckus' definition of white supremacy. However, we would make some adjustments to the definition: White supremacy is a system that grants those defined as "white" special socio-economic privileges in American society. Through these privileges, many whites protect each other and police non-whites in order to maintain their white status and the hegemony of the ruling class. Therefore, the ruling class created institutional white supremacy as a means to control the working class; white working class members gain privilege and identify with the white ruling class as opposed to other non-white or even white revolutionary members of their own class. To dismantle the ruling class is to dismantle a privilege for white workers. This alliance does have international implications in that almost all of the white working class in the U.S. identifies with a white national identity, which is a cross class relationship, over an international class identity which unites those who are oppressed along economic conditions.

We view white supremacy as a separate but intricately connected form of institutional oppression from capitalism (this is also true for patriarchy). These institutions come together to form the various oppressions or privileges we face and in effect, alter, shape and help (amongst other conditions) to equally create capitalism. As these institutions change so does capitalism and vice versa. The goal of our revolutionary work is



to see institutional oppression collapse so we may live in a new stateless, classless, and oppressive free, society based on mutual aid and directly democratic principles. Hence, we ally our selves with autonomous social movements, which may also be fighting for such goals. Our entry point to our work is a class analysis of society. This does not prioritize class as the worst oppression or even the best oppression for all oppressed people to organize around. It does mean that for us as members of NEFAC, it is A STRATEGIC choice for us. Of course we believe in our strategy and argue our theoretical positions, but our basis of thought does not come from an absolute understanding based in rationalism or empiricism.

While still on the topic, we would like to comment on the definition of racism used by Ryan C. McCarthy in his essay "Reasserting Anarchist Internationalism" [NEA #6, p. 42]. As outlined above, we consider racism to be a specific institution established and upheld by the ruling class that is related to specific socio-economic conditions. By McCarthy stating that "[r]acism is therefore not an institution that stands for itself, but rather a very useful toll in the hand of capital," he fails to recognize that racism is more than just a "tool." Power and racism play out in many different ways in society and through various channels, such as sexual orientation, religion, gender, race, etc. Oppressions expressed through such channels (and through countless others which are not named) are inherently connected to economics, but they are also connected to each other and everything else. Using McCarthy's logic would dictate that if capitalism fell, then these oppressions would simply melt away and ignores the fact that white supremacy is an institution. The oppressions that give way to racism are shaped and influenced by capitalism and vice versa. In giving an accurate definition of racism, we must recognize that while racism is linked to economics, it also exists as a separate entity, bringing with it a series of interconnected problems that we need to combat.

## STRATEGY

Our disagreement with BTR does not rest in a difference between race vs. class organizing. That is much too simplistic of an analysis of oppression, as it reduces our class analysis and worldview into separate dichotomies and reduces oppres-

sion and people's lives into neat, finely established categories of race, class and gender, which simply do not exist. The differences lie in the emphasis BTR places on the importance of race in the maintenance of capitalism and therefore, indirectly on the lack of importance other institutional forms of oppression have in maintaining capitalism - such as patriarchy - and in the fact that their strategy and actions (at least those represented in the article) do not fully reflect, nor would they achieve, the desired results of abolishing the white race.

The two primary strategies that have been proposed by BTR to begin a movement with the goal of abolishing the white race are Copwatch and prisoner solidarity/prison abolition. The reasoning behind choosing these two projects seems to be that since people of color are disproportionately impacted by the police state, are more likely to receive a violent response from cops, and are more likely to be victim of the prison industrial complex, one step towards abolishing the white race is to abolish these institutions, or significantly reduce their effectiveness in controlling communities of color, thereby creating a crisis in whiteness.

Yes, most people who are abused by police, receive the worst jail sentences and are disproportionately sentenced to death row are people of color. Yes, communities of color are policed more heavily than white

and state repression. But the BTR theory seems to rely on the concept that just because many people of color are adversely affected by the police and prison industrial complex, that abolishing these institutions would create a crisis in whiteness and simultaneously in capitalism.

There are also a number of other important factors - most people of color in the US are poor. Most people of color in the US do not have access to educational opportunities because of inadequate schooling, racist busing systems, and racist school/neighborhood zoning plans. Most public housing tenants are people of color, and most of these housing units are inadequate. People of color have the highest rate of new cases of HIV/AIDS and black women die of breast cancer and ovarian cancer at a higher rate than white women primarily because of inadequate health care (public and private), racist health care facilities and insurance companies.

Our point is that nearly all institutions in the US have an adverse impact on people of color and poor/working class white people when compared to how they impact wealthy or middle class whites. Why then would we think that the strategies of Copwatch and prison abolition are somehow more suited to abolishing the white race than effective housing organizing or struggling for adequate health care?



communities. And yes, most people in prison are people of color, specifically African American men. We fail, however, to see how working on these two issues works to abolish the white race. We can see that this is important, necessary work that is invaluable to a revolutionary movement and to the victims of police violence

Our proposal is to take on strategies that build power within all oppressed communities, that are devoid of a hierarchy of oppressions, and recognize that in order to move towards a social revolution, it is necessary to simultaneously create a crisis in white supremacy, in patriarchy and between classes.



In the BTR essay by Roy San Filippo [NEA#6], it is implied or suggested that by white people showing the police that they are defiant and that the "enemy," "criminal" or "bad guy" cannot be determined by the color of their skin, steps will be made toward abolishing whiteness. Is this to suggest that white people should put themselves in situations where they are risking arrest, being beaten by police, arrested, serving prison time, etc. to prove to the cops that all criminals are not people of color? How does this serve to build a revolutionary movement? This does not build community, it demonstrates a level of privilege held by the white participants that has previously and continually been resented by people of color and poor whites. Proponents of Race Traitor and BTR have stated that "...the class bias of the law is partially repressed by racial considerations; the removal of those considerations would give it free reign. White poor would find themselves on the receiving end of police justice as Black people do now. The effect on their consciousness and behavior is predictable." (1) There are many examples of white revolutionaries who risk arrest, challenge police, and participate in direct action at mass demonstrations and at smaller community demonstrations. These activists are generally critiqued for their participation in demonstrations as they are perceived as exercising their privilege. If it is the act of challenging police authority by white revolutionaries that is an inherent affront to whiteness, then why is a distinction made between white revolutionaries risking arrest and challenging police during a demonstration and white revolutionaries risking arrest and challenging police under the pretense of Copwatch? Both strategies have the same result - showing the police that white people can challenge authority and are just as supposedly "criminal" as people of color. By challenging the police and risking arrest at a mass demonstration, haven't white revolutionaries worked to eliminate the racial considerations of the law? If no, why not?

If poor whites are going to actively challenge white supremacy it needs to come from struggle and a political alliance with people of color. The challenge must be revolutionary and must be framed in a way that those participating receive direct, concrete benefits from their participation. Building a cross-race class-consciousness is precisely one way to build such political solidarity. Unfortunately, though BTR's strategies are valuable in and of them-

selves, Copwatch and prison abolition work do very little to build an anti-racist white movement and do not align poor whites with poor people of color; therefore it has little impact on white supremacy.

Secondly, the theoretical position of the importance of race and its connections with capitalism and other institutional oppressions is questionable and reeks of theoretical authoritarianism. It crudely reduces our conceptions of oppression in society, and also those institutions which create such oppression, into simplistic and separate categories.

BTR claims that their focus on race is a strategic argument based around the importance of race in connection to capitalism. However, a closer look seems to point to a theoretical importance, emphasis and value of race in current or even historical capitalism that devalues other forms of institutional oppression and sets white supremacy above and beyond, to a theoretical "end all be all" in the various complex parts that construct an economic system. As BTR has stated, their decision to focus on race is....

*"...a strategic argument, based on an analysis of U.S. history, designed to attack the American death star at its weakest point. The glue that has kept the American state together has been white supremacy; melting that glue creates revolutionary possibilities."*

Capitalism, an economic process in society, is a complex ever changing system, comprised of many social and economic processes. These different processes combine to equally form the monster we know as capitalism. To claim that race or white supremacy is "the glue" that binds the whole economic system together reduces the various processes and places emphasis on one particular category. It is our opinion that each oppressive institution, including capitalism, cannot be reduced so simplistically. In reducing the existence of capitalism to one particular form of oppression, such as race, you are inevitably valuing one process over all others. By taking this position, BTR has, in effect, placed an authoritarian theoretical importance on race over other forms of oppression. San Filippo did state that they do not believe they "posses any kind of truth or correct ideas about struggle", however, their theoretical position surrounding race clearly contradict his statements.

For instance, BTR claims the organiza-

tion has an explicitly feminist focus, but it simultaneously down plays the relative importance patriarchy plays as opposed to race in relation to capitalism. To continue the metaphor, is patriarchy not a glue? Is its binding power too weak and is therefore, less important for revolutionaries to struggle against in class based organizing. If patriarchy is not on an equal footing with race or class, then it is easy to dismiss BTR's argument. To simply say an organization has a "feminist focus" is not enough especially when its main theoretical position downplays the very importance of patriarchy in their work.

Since its development, capitalism has been intricately entwined with patriarchy. Each process has largely benefited from the other and has produced new forms of not only class oppression but gender oppression as well; conditions which cannot be neatly separated from each other. Unpaid "women's work", gendered class divisions, privileging one gender in the work force over another, and all the social controls that emanate from such an institution all work to maintain patriarchy. Never mind the various social conditions and responsibilities each gender has which are very much a part of the conditions of existence of capitalism, such as the development of the nuclear family and the gendered role of political decision making in capitalist governments.

San Filippo states that "BTR is a class war document". Therefore, BTR's race organizing is to establish class war. It is precisely to "engender a revolutionary crisis in the existing system by attacking the institutions of white supremacy" [San Filippo, NEA#6, p. 41]. This in and of itself we applaud. To combat white supremacy is important and necessary to ending all oppression and simultaneously important in any class based organizing, but it is no more important in the demise of capitalism and the state than patriarchy or class.

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# a synthesis of RACE AND CLASS:

## A Look at the Black Panther Party and its Goal of Black Liberation

by Jorge & JT

In bringing about radical social change wherein lies the revolutionary potential of a people? Is the racial/national condition of primary importance? Or is class and the relation to the means of production the guiding principle of a people in revolt? Are race and class mutually exclusive? Is nationalism always reactionary and bourgeois, or can revolutionary nationalism exist?

These and similar questions come about when discussing the legacy of the Black Panther Party, its political platform, ideology and its positions on race and class. Many critics, especially of Marxist tendencies, have questioned the revolutionary character and potential of the BPP given its nationalist and race-specific beliefs.

The International Workingman's Association (or First International) declared: "the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the workers themselves." The logic is implicit: the liberation of a given group must occur from within. A prisoner in order to be free must first and foremost understand that they are a prisoner; they must show a willingness to free themselves. That the warden will free the prisoner is as ridiculous and unlikely as the prospect of the bourgeoisie emancipating the working class.

Thus, in October 1966 the Black Panther Party formed following the same logic. This time however, the targeted audience was not the Orthodox Marxist revolutionary subject: the industrial proletariat, but instead the Black population of the United States. The first point of the party's ten-point program states: "We believe that black people will not be free until we are able to determine our destiny." It was obvious to Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, the party's co-founders, that Black liberation would not only occur from within the Black population but also and more importantly that Black liberation would be defined in Black terms,

and not exclusively, or even necessarily, in Marxist and other non-Black idioms. In this spirit, Revolutionary Black Nationalism became the BPP's guiding principle and founding ideology.

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

According to the Party, nationalism in the vein of the BPP was indeed revolutionary because its political end was not the Black nation-state itself. Instead Black Nationalism served to counterbalance the bourgeois nation-state. Similar to Marx's dialectical evolution of the class struggle, Black Nationalism emerged as the antithetical response to white bourgeois nationalism. The greater goal of the BPP in its earlier stage was to undermine the inequalities inherent in white nationalism, as well as provide a necessary step for the evolution of the Black liberation struggle. Similarly, it could be argued that the Black population of America acted as the proletariat of the white bourgeoisie. Black Nationalism, as opposed to traditional bourgeois/white nationalism, therefore is dialectically proven to be revolutionary.

It would be unfair to observe the Black Panther Party's ideology and political platform solely through a Marxist scope, however. After all, the party itself drew from other schools of thought, specifically the anti-colonialist views of Fanon.

Drawing from Fanon, Huey Newton thus explains the circumstance of Blacks in the United States to colonies in his *Revolutionary Suicide*: "Cut off, ignored, and forgotten, the people are kept in a state of subjugation, especially by the police, who treat the communities like colonies."

The revolutionary program in Fanonist terms, although comparable to Marx's call for a workers' revolution, further justifies nationalism and other forms of political and

cultural identification as revolutionary. However, the BPP certainly did not use anarchist theory in its development (with the exception of Eldridge Cleaver's fixation with Bakunin and Sergei Nechaev's infamous *Revolutionary Catechism*). The BPP is notorious for having a highly authoritarian structure, and depending on which city or chapter is examined, the Party often used militarist ranking systems when referring to one another, and digression from this structure was met with disdain.

As the party evolved, and its theoretical analysis developed, BPP ideology attained a more internationalist outlook. The anti-imperialist rhetoric of the BPP, and the authoritarian structure, are prime examples of the Maoist influence on the party's ideology. The United States was the mightiest imperialist government in the world, exerting its influence well beyond its own borders, but more importantly for the African-American population, the US was seen by the BPP as an imperialist power oppressing the Black nation within America. In turn, and following Maoist thought, the BPP engaged in their struggle for Black liberation within an anti-imperialist context.

The party also borrowed from Mao a strong sense of organizational discipline and emphasized criticism and self-criticism. The little red book was read by all party members and served as, not a guide for revolutionary praxis, but also as a sort of personal rulebook. Furthermore, the respect to the self-determination of all people and the belief that revolutionary potential is found in all victims of imperialism, and not just the industrial proletariat, is perfectly mirrored in the party's many "survival programs" such as the Free Breakfast for Children which served to alleviate the immediate needs of the black community but also hoped to educate and raise the revolutionary consciousness of



the Black masses. Newton explains:

*"Every ethnic group has particular needs that they know and understand better than anybody else; each group is the best judge of how its institutions ought to affect the lives of its members."*

Finally, the idea that "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun" is perhaps most obviously represented in the party's tactics on self-defense and their insistence on appearing in public fully armed.

## RACISM, CAPITALISM, AND REVOLUTIONARY VIOLENCE

Which then was the greater evil to be fought? Were capital and the alienation of the Black worker the source of inspiration for the BPP when determining its revolutionary program? Or did the party reduce its analysis to a simple and two-dimensional, black and white racist "Amerikkka"? Clearly the party ideologues were interested in drawing from different schools of thought. Subsequently, their struggle developed with respect to the complex and multifaceted material, social, political and cultural condition of Blacks in the United States. It is safe to say then that their struggle against racism was as important as their struggle against capital. More importantly however, the Black Panther Party appreciated the connection between capital and racism. In this sense, their struggles against both evils were not mutually exclusive, but instead complementary. As was previously noted, Newton explains: "Never convinced that destroying capitalism would automatically destroy racism, I felt, however, that we could not destroy racism without wiping out its economic foundations."

The Black Panther Party acknowledged the importance of adopting a revolutionary attitude towards its racial and class struggles and consequently adopted a praxis of armed self-defense. The party's perspective on violence developed from their own violent oppression. Therefore, their decision to

approach Black liberation from a self-defense standpoint was in fact a response towards their condition rather than an unapologetic justification of violence.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRAXIS: ARMED SELF-DEFENSE vs. COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Tracing the ideological history and development of the BPP is a complex and at times counterintuitive exercise. Perhaps harder to determine however, is the lifespan of the party itself. Nevertheless, for all intents and purposes, the Black Panther Party was founded in 1966 and was dissolved in 1971 as a result of the Newton-Cleaver split. The reasons for the split, in true Panther spirit, are quite complicated. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale drafted the Panther ten-point program in October 1966. At the moment of its founding the BPP consisted of Seale and Newton alone. By 1970 however, the party had more than 45 chapters nation-wide, a membership of

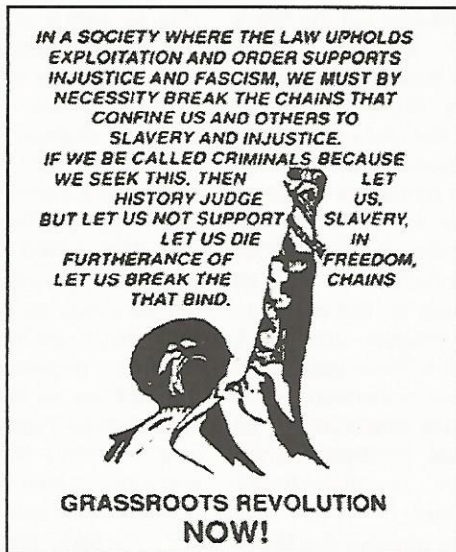
5000+ and an international section. While external factors attributed considerably to the party's tragic demise, most notably J. Edgar Hoover's COINTELPRO program, internal divisions played an important role in dividing and eventually destroying the BPP. As the party grew, and because the founding members found themselves in prison shortly after 1966 (Huey Newton was

program advocated for armed self-defense of black people in America. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale believed that the situation in Oakland, California (as in many other cities in America) was intolerable - considerable numbers of African-Americans were constant victims of police brutality and murders - and therefore began their program of patrolling the police. Newton explains the reasoning behind point seven: "The emphasis on weapons was a necessary phase in our evolution, based on Frantz Fanon's contention that the people have to be shown that colonizers and their agents - the police - are not bullet-proof. We saw this action as a bold step in making our program known and raising the consciousness of the people."

Other points of the program were stressed as well however, and the Black Panther Party did not limit its tactical struggles to what ultimately was a symbolic show of force. Perhaps the best of these programs was the Free Breakfast for Children started in 1969. Ward Churchill, a historian and Native American activist, states that such a program was "meeting the daily nutritional requirements of an estimated 50,000 grade-schoolers in forty-five inner cities across the country" and it accounted "for the Party's extraordinary popularity among urban blacks during the late 1960's."

As time passed however, questions began to emerge within the party (as well as without) about the revolutionary nature of such remedial "survival programs." Was feeding children part of the agenda of an alleged revolutionary organization? Instead of devoting its energies in alleviating the conditions under the American capitalist and racist system, why didn't the party engage in more militant and armed-struggle-oriented activities? Such were the opinions of Eldridge Cleaver, who deemed the community-oriented programs "reformist" and instead preferred the party's original emphasis on self-defense and police patrolling. If Black people were going to be given aid within the system while not directly confronting the institutions of capital and racism, didn't the BPP run the risk of losing its radicalness? Surely providing lower class African-Americans with free health service alleviated their immediate needs, but how effective was it in ending racism and capitalism?

Newton argues that in fact such forms of community organizing and activism became more effective and appropriate than their earlier activities centered around



accused of the murder of a police officer in late 1967 while Bobby Seale was convicted as one of the "Chicago Eight" during the Democratic National Convention) different factionalisms emerged across the different chapters. Most of these divisions were sparked by ideological and tactical disputes between Newton and Eldridge Cleaver. Mumia Abu Jamal explains: "...there was no single BPP; there were many, unified in one national organization, to be sure, but separated by the various regional and cultural influences that form and inform consciousness."

Point number seven of the ten-point pro-



self-defense: "We soon discovered that weapons and uniforms set us apart from the community... perhaps our military strategy was too much of "a great leap forward." Indeed such genuine commitment served to encourage ideas of mutual aid and solidarity among low and middle class blacks. Furthermore, by limiting the struggle of the BPP to just one of the ten points of its founding program would be in contradiction to party ideology. Important to note is that party faced a militarily stronger enemy, hell-bent on disrupting and eventually destroying every and all efforts of the Black liberation movement. In fact, J. Edgar Hoover declared in June 1969: "the Black Panther Party, without question, represents the greatest threat to internal security of the country."

Tactically, as well as politically, the decision to de-emphasize the armed persona of the Panthers was a conscious attempt on the part of Huey Newton and the National Headquarters at Oakland to better engage in the struggle of black liberation. Guns had served to jumpstart the BPP's popularity and demonstrate its resolve, but community organizing gave the party an opportunity to become more acquainted with the social realities of those it aimed to liberate.

Inasmuch as race and class were not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary to each other, community organizing and armed struggle could have been simultaneously engaged and supported. Both, after all, had the equal potential to advance the interests of Blacks and help in developing revolutionary consciousness. Nevertheless, inasmuch as exclusive attention to the armed struggle might have led to the party's early demise at the hands of the State, exclusive attention to solely remedial programs such as the free clinics and free breakfasts might have led to a more liberal and reformist BPP.

Perhaps the party would have benefited and maximized its potential as a Revolutionary Black Nationalist organization by broadening its struggles to both remedial and immediate programs as well as more militant activities so long as they were both aimed at a common and revolutionary goal: the necessity for Black people to gain control of the institutions in their own communities, eventually transforming them into cooperatives, and of one day working with other ethnic groups to change the system.

More importantly however, and for the fate of the Black liberation movement, the

party would have benefited from adopting less authoritarian practices and structures. Regrettably, and given the hierarchical nature of its organization, the BPP's demise was ultimately sparked by a simple feud between two party leaders.

## OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

It is safe to say that the Black Panther Party was the most important revolutionary organization in America during the late 20th century. Its successes were not coincidental. The Panther theoretical analysis and development outlined the oppression of African Americans within the institutions of racism and capitalism. Its struggles and ideology made the necessary connections between the two forms of oppression. Partly drawing from previous movements and ideologies (more importantly Marxism, Fanonism and Maoism) and partly because of their own active involvement in the day-to-day struggles of Black America, the BPP was able to develop a truly revolutionary political platform that presented a more just and viable alternative.

Nevertheless, mistakes were made and shortcomings led to the early demise of the party. While the BPP's racial and class analysis might be commended (indeed it produced one of the most complete and revolutionary theories resulting of the 1960's) it must be observed that some of its practices and beliefs ultimately had negative effects on the Black population as members of a given class and racial group.

The party's emphasis on vanguardist organizational structures replicated some of the very oppressive structures that it aimed to combat. Race and class are not abstract concepts; racism, classism and capitalism therefore exist and manifest themselves at every level of social interaction. To claim that a revolutionary organization is immune from reactionary elements is therefore flawed. It would be ridiculous to claim that the party practiced "reverse racism" - as some have claimed over the years in hopes of discrediting its legacy - nevertheless, social oppressions found outside of the party were present inside of the party as well. Authoritarian structures, such as those advocated by the majority of the leftist organizations of the 60's, failed to address the issue of social oppressions in their entirety. Additionally the Party's failed to address issues of Patriarchy as an explicit point in their 10-point Program. This, coupled with notorious examples of male dominance, sexual harassment and

abuse towards women within the ranks of the Party, shows an inherent conflict within the Party's platform, and is another example of the leadership of the Party failing to recognize how they were in fact maintaining oppressive institutions.

By developing hierarchical social and political systems within the BPP, Huey Newton and other party leaders were effectively replicating oppressive forces found within the system they were combating. The question of "human emancipation" is simultaneously a question of social as well as individual liberation. If the power of the individual is compromised over the good of the collective, the revolutionary potential of the said collective is compromised as well. What if the party had developed more participatory and horizontal structures? Surely, the leadership would have seen its power and authority compromised. Nevertheless such compromise could have ultimately benefited the party structure. For if the authority had been decentralized and delegated through the many chapters and members of the party, it would have taken more than a couple blows to effectively end the BPP in 1971.

The Black Panther Party was genuinely committed to the people it aimed to liberate. Its theory was clearly revolutionary and, in true Marxist and Fanonist spirit, it emanated from the material, as well as social, cultural and racial conditions of the African American population of the US. Nevertheless, where the BPP excelled in revolutionary theory and commitment it lacked in revolutionary structure. Regrettably, it failed to recognize the oppressive nature of its leadership and party organization that ultimately led to its very demise.

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# National Struggle and Class Struggle in Puerto Rico: Lessons for Anarchists



by Michael Staudenmaier

In the past 150 years, assertions of national identity and class identity have transformed the world in which we live, changing the self-understanding, motivations, and actions of billions of human beings. To the extent that one identity is deemed more important than the other, various national struggles and class struggles, sometimes contradictory and sometimes complementary, have emerged in all parts of the planet. As anarchists struggling for revolution, we need to comprehend the contradictions of nation and class in historical context.

The Puerto Rican experience represents a microcosm of many of these issues. Like many nations in the Americas, Puerto Ricans have a history of repression and resistance that demands an understanding of race, class, (neo-)colonialism, gender, and other key concepts. Further, the Puerto Rican diaspora has largely settled in North America, especially in industrial cities in the Northeast and Midwest of the United States. For anarchists working in formations like NEFAC or FRAC-GL, there is much to be learned from an analysis of Puerto Rican history, and the lens of national struggle and class struggle highlights some valuable lessons for anarchists.

Puerto Rican history since the mid-nineteenth century can be understood to consist of five eras (although these divisions are somewhat arbitrary). The first, extending from approximately 1850 to 1898, corresponds to the decline of Spanish colonial power and the rise of Puerto Rican national identity. The second, from 1898 to 1920, dovetails with the rise and decline of the anarchist and syndicalist movements on the island. The third, from 1920 to 1960, covers the rise of status issues (independence, statehood, and commonwealth) as the key political debate among Puerto Ricans. The fourth period, from 1960 to 1990, includes the rise of Leninism and

armed struggle inside the nationalist movement on the island and in the diaspora. Finally, the fifth period, from 1990 to the present, has seen major upheavals in the political scene that have important implications for anarchists.

## 1850-1898: Dead History of the Tainos

The birth of Puerto Rican national identity lies in the misery of four hundred years of Spanish colonialism. The "three roots" (to use a common phrase) of Puerto Rican culture are the indigenous Taino culture, the forcibly imported culture of West African slaves, and the Iberian culture of the Spanish colonizers. Beginning with Taino and slave revolts, the creation of maroon societies -- free communities, found throughout the Americas, inhabited by a mix of escaped slaves, rebellious Europeans, and indigenous peoples -- in the mountains of Puerto Rico allowed for the development of a hybrid culture of resistance that continued even after the total genocide of the indigenous population. Anti-slavery struggles among liberal sectors of the Spanish population built upon this tradition, and upon the influence of South American liberator Simon Bolivar, who briefly visited the small island of Vieques early in the nineteenth century. The nascent national bourgeoisie also attached itself, at least rhetorically, to this same liberalism.

The most important leader of these anti-slavery campaigns was Ramon Emeterio Betances, who is considered to this day the father of Puerto Rican nationalism. Betances was a liberal criollo (Spaniard by descent), a European-educated doctor with a strongly humanitarian and revolutionary approach to the world. He advocated a confederation of the Antilles (the stretch of islands in the Caribbean from Cuba to Trinidad, all of

which were heavily involved in the slave trade and populated at least partly by Africans) that reflected the inspiration of Bolivar's pan-Americanism.

In classic nineteenth century fashion, Betances and others developed a revolutionary conspiracy designed to overthrow the Spanish colonial regime and establish an independent Puerto Rico. This effort, known afterward as the Grito de Lares (the Cry of Lares, named for the mountain town in which much of the fighting took place), was initially intended to be a multifaceted attack, involving a naval invasion to be led by Betances from Santo Domingo (now the Dominican Republic), which was intended to deliver arms purchased in the United States to a number of rural rebellions centered around Lares. The liberal middle class was approached to support the conspiracy, but response was mixed because many liberals deemed the prospects good for a peaceful transition to independence.

Unfortunately, the Spanish authorities uncovered the conspiracy a week before its scheduled start, due to the double cross of a Spanish military officer who offered to provide weapons to the conspirators, only to report the revolutionaries immediately. At the same time, the government of Santo Domingo prohibited Betances and the other exiles from sailing with the weapons, which forced the uprising to proceed with very few guns. The insurrection, short of fighters and weapons, was put down almost immediately. Many of the conspirators were killed; others died while imprisoned or survived and were later pardoned. Betances subsequently participated in other, even less successful conspiracies, but eventually went to live in exile in France, where he apparently participated in a conspiracy with turn-of-the-century Spanish anarchists to assassinate Spanish royalty. Despite the negative



outcome, the Grito de Lares is considered the founding moment in the Puerto Rican national struggle.

This history offers certain parallels with the revolutions elsewhere in Latin America, but it also provides some intriguing divergences. For instance, most of the Latin American revolutions against the Spanish were animated by debates among the local bourgeoisie over the status of indigenous populations. Should they be physically exterminated via exclusion from the nation and dispossession from land (the conservative position, which corresponded nicely with the approach then being developed by the United States), or culturally exterminated through forced inclusion, Christianized education, and cultural assimilation (the liberal position)? Both these approaches embraced white supremacy as an essential component in the development of national identity, be it in Mexico, Colombia, or Argentina.

An important historical fact ensured that the Puerto Rican experience would differ from this model: the indigenous Tainos had in fact been physically exterminated centuries before anyone thought of her- or himself as Puerto Rican. The dead history of the Tainos formed a convenient basis for the creation of a Puerto Rican national identity that included indigenous cultural elements (in music, food, language and other areas) without having to struggle with the messy issue of what to do with an actual human population. The result was the irrelevance of the conservative position, and the consolidation of the liberal position with the anti-slavery sentiments of Betances and others.

At the same time, grassroots struggles from below, the legacy of the maroon societies from the previous centuries, provided a substantial counter to the liberal position. There are historical parallels here as well to the wars of liberation in other parts of Latin America. The pro-indigenous class struggle led by Morelos and Hidalgo in Mexico, for instance, constituted the core of the independence movement there before the bourgeoisie was able to consolidate its control over the direction of the revolt against Spain. In Puerto Rico, Betances and his co-conspirators placed an anti-slavery plank front and center in the struggle for independence from Spain. The whole situation exemplified the contradictions of an anti-white supremacist nationalism being built on the legacy of white supremacy.

Thus, white supremacy was hardly absent from the development of the Puerto

Rican nation. As long as there have been Puerto Ricans, they have struggled with the contradictions of slavery and genocide, and with the cultural inclusion and physical exclusion of African and indigenous societies. As has been the case with every national identity forged in the Western hemisphere, white supremacy played an essential role in the development of the Puerto Rican nation, but not in the simple one-sided ways one might expect.

## 1898-1920: My Enemy's Enemy

In 1898, shortly after Betances' death, the brief and relatively bloodless Spanish-American War dramatically changed the course of Puerto Rican history. The long, slow decline of Spanish colonialism in the Americas was finally concluded, and US imperial domination was expanded into the Caribbean and the Pacific, especially in the Philippines, Cuba and Puerto Rico. The turmoil created by the transition from Spanish to North American colonialism created an opening for the then-developing labor movement in Puerto Rico, which was heavily anarchist.

The classic image of anarchism's rise to prominence in the Puerto Rican labor movement concerns the tobacco workers' union, whose internationalist members rolled cigars in factories across the Caribbean, from Florida to Cuba to Puerto Rico, often fleeing repression or lack of work in one location only to take a comparable job in another. The unions, comprising these precursors of the globalized economy, routinely spent money to hire "readers" for each factory, whose job was simply to read aloud to the workers. Frequently included on the proudly radical but non-sectarian reading lists were writers like Bakunin, Kropotkin, Proudhon, and Malatesta. As the mostly illiterate, but highly mobile, tobacco workers heard more about anarchism, its profile grew.

After years of regional and trade-based organizing under Spanish rule, the Free Labor Federation (FLT) was formed in 1899, uniting most trade-unions on the island. The dominant and competing ideologies in the FLT from the beginning were anarchism, mostly imported from Spain and popular with the rank and file, and a reformist socialism reminiscent of Daniel De Leon's North American socialism. While never an explicitly anarchist organization, the Federation represents the high-water mark in the history of anarchism in Puerto Rico.

With the transfer to US rule, the leadership of the FLT took an interesting approach to labor organizing: it actively courted the support of US labor organizations, especially the American Federation of Labor (AFL). History might have been different had the IWW existed when the FLT was formed in 1899, since the Free Federation's early revolutionary syndicalism was a near-perfect match for the Wobblies. In contrast to the IWW, however, the FLT never expelled the "politicals" who believed in legislating social democracy; these forces were bolstered by the support of the AF of L for the bread-and-butter organizing of the FLT. Over time, the leadership of the Free Federation adopted an increasingly Americanized (and liberal) approach to labor struggle.

Among the anarchists, pragmatic grassroots organizing went hand in hand with ideological proselytizing. Luisa Capetillo, the most famous anarchist in Puerto Rican history, spent years organizing workers in all industries and all locales, advocating a mixture of mystical socialism, free-love feminism, and class-struggle anarchism. Sometimes referred to as the Emma Goldman of Puerto Rico, she was expelled from Cuba for wearing pants in public, although her agitational activities might also have had something to do with it. Anarchists like Capetillo utilized the FLT as a resource and an organizing platform, while disdaining the increasingly liberal attitudes adopted by the bureaucrats at the top.

This pro-US liberalism led to an important and instructive dispute in the second decade of the twentieth century. In 1917, the Jones Act made Puerto Ricans citizens of the United States. The debate in Puerto Rico over the value of citizenship pitted the newly developing independentista movement, which opposed citizenship, against the leadership of the FLT, which supported citizenship. To make matters more interesting, the Unionist Party (bastion of the independentista movement under the leadership of Jose de Diego) controlled the House of Delegates, the only island-wide elected governmental body in Puerto Rico, while the Free Federation represented (in theory, at least) an entire class of the population largely excluded from the electoral process for economic and literacy reasons. The House of Delegates voted overwhelmingly to oppose the Jones Bill, while the Executive Council of the FLT sent a declaration to the US Congress outlining its support for the same legislation.



The Free Federation viewed the drive for independence with suspicion, fearing the Unionists were positioning themselves as a domestic bourgeoisie, which, once free of the yoke of US imperialism, would act swiftly to eliminate any radical organizations that challenged the class basis of the newly independent Puerto Rico. This suspicion was only reinforced by the strong ties between independentistas like de Diego and the local capitalists and land-owners who frequently doubled as members of the House of Delegates.

While the Free Federation was certainly correct in this assessment of the Unionists, as far as it went, there was more to the story. The independentistas, for instance, were eventually proven right in their fear that citizenship would make future independence from the US far more difficult. Similarly, the general independentista arguments against US colonialism have had far more historical resonance in the ensuing century than have the pro-labor arguments for integration. In addition, the interests of the Free Federation's leadership were not entirely pure: the growing relationship between the FLT and the AF of L would have been challenged by a move toward independence. On a certain level, the Unionists were right for the wrong reasons, while the FLT had (mostly) laudable motivations, but drew the wrong conclusion.

In the end, the FLT proved the old adage, my enemy's enemy is not my friend. Finding itself in a triangular struggle with the local bourgeoisie and the imperial power of the US, the Free Federation's leadership attempted to play the latter off against the former, only to get more than it bargained for. Puerto Rico's labor movement was largely spared the extreme repression that decimated the IWW in the United States after World War One, but it was still unable to adapt to changing circumstances. When the newly imposed US citizenship led more quickly to death (in the form of the draft during the War) than to equality or economic justice, the Free Federation was doomed. While subsequent labor organizations retained significant power, none was as radical at its base, or as thorough-going in its anti-capitalism. And with the death of the FLT, the anarchist presence in Puerto Rico ceased almost completely.

## 1920-1960: Pan, Tierra y Libertad

While anarchism fell on hard times, nationalism became the leading radical movement on the island. The independence movement was dramatically transformed in the 1920's by the rise of the Nationalist Party, headed by Pedro Albizu Campos. Albizu is a fascinating character, without a doubt the most important independentista of the twentieth century. Born to a working class black (mulatto) family, Albizu won a scholarship to attend university in the United States, where he studied at the University of Vermont and at Harvard. While at Harvard around 1920, Albizu solidified his nationalist sentiments through work with the Irish republican solidarity movement in Boston.

Returning to Puerto Rico, Albizu joined the newly formed Nationalist Party, and quickly became its leader. The Party was a jumble of elements, including strongly Catholic and even a few Falangist (pro-Spanish and pro-fascist) tendencies, alongside revolutionary internationalists and large numbers of black Puerto Ricans. Both working class and middle class communities were well represented, although middle class cultural elements (including a fondness for the Spanish aspects of Puerto Rican culture) predominated. The Party was most notable for its anti-electoral stance and its militant tactics, embracing direct action and even armed struggle on behalf of Puerto Rican independence. As a result of the passionate speeches of Albizu, and the daring actions of Party members, the Nationalists became increasingly popular.

At the same time, the old guard of the independence movement was regaining some momentum of its own. The Popular Democratic Party (the Populares), under the leadership of Luis Munoz Marin, successfully filled the electoral void left by the demise of older pro-American parties. Munoz Marin was the son of a key leader of the turn of the century independence movement, and he himself advocated a strong degree of self-government for Puerto Ricans. The rising fortunes of the Nationalist Party forced the Populares to the left politically, demanding more from the US in an effort to pacify the population.

But by the 1940's, Munoz Marin had come to an agreement with the US government to implement a degree of autonomy known as the Commonwealth, or Freely Associated State. This formula, still in practice today, represents a balance between

the demands of independentistas and of statehooders, who urge full integration with the US as the 51st state. Like all such compromises, it satisfied neither side, but Munoz Marin's personal charisma and the material gains offered by Commonwealth status quieted the Populares.

These bread and butter gains were reflected as well in the rhetoric and image of the Populares. The Party adopted as its slogan the demand "Pan, Tierra y Libertad" ("Bread, Land and Freedom"), and its logo was a profile of a "jibaro", the archetypal peasant farmer who represents to this day the backbone of the Puerto Rican working class. This effort to position itself as the party of the working class was largely successful, and Munoz Marin was repeatedly elected Governor of Puerto Rico, despite his periodic changes of political orientation.

The Nationalists, meanwhile, were subject to intense repression, including the extended imprisonment of Albizu, along with the surveillance, harassment, and murder of other Party members. In the face of this repression, the Nationalists planned a three-pronged uprising to gain independence, staged (once again, ahead of schedule due to discovery of the conspiracy by the police) on October 30, 1950. The plan included an attack on the Governor's mansion in San Juan, a rebellion in the mountain town of Jayuya, and, most stunning, an assassination attempt against President Harry Truman in Washington DC.

Known as the Grito de Jayuya (the Cry of Jayuya), the uprising was a spectacular failure. Truman survived (although largely due to luck), the Governor's mansion was successfully defended, and the US Air Force quickly bombed Jayuya into submission. Albizu was besieged in his home, and only gave himself up after determining that the Grito had not gained mass support. He spent all but a few months of the rest of his life in prison in the US.

Tactical errors and bad luck were key to the demise of an already improbable uprising against the world's most powerful country. But the longer-term inability of the Nationalists to foment a revolution was the result of bigger problems. First, of course, was the massive repression the Party faced, from wire-taps to assassinations. Puerto Rico was the testing ground for what later became known as COINTELPRO, and only the strong internal discipline of the Party organization kept it from collapsing under the combined weight of legal and extra-legal persecution.



Nonetheless, there were internal problems as well. Where the Populares were able to appeal directly to working class identity, the Nationalists promoted a national identity as Puerto Ricans, with little clarification of its class basis. The tension between class identity and national identity was never clearer than in the struggles between the Albizu and Munoz Marin. Albizu was from the working class, while Munoz Marin was a classic product of the Puerto Rican bourgeoisie, but with their roles reversed, the Populares built a mass base of support that the Nationalists never obtained.

## 1960-1990: Cada Guaraguao Tiene su Pitirre

In 1959, Fidel Castro emerged as the new leader of a revolutionary Cuba, advocating Leninism and armed struggle for national liberation in Latin America. A few hundred miles east, a number of veterans of the Nationalist Party recognized in the Cuban revolution a potential model for their own struggle. Foremost among these was Juan Antonio Corretjer, who from the sixties to the eighties doubled as one of the island's greatest poets and as its most sophisticated theorist of armed struggle. Just as Albizu represented the move toward militancy and insurrection, Corretjer symbolized the shift toward clandestine organization and Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Corretjer had become Albizu's friend while serving time in prison with him after the Grito de Jayuya; Albizu was impressed that Corretjer, in solidarity with the Nationalists, chose imprisonment rather than informing prosecutors that he was not involved in the Grito. Corretjer went on to found the Puerto Rican Socialist League (LSP), which was a small but influential cadre group focused on reorienting the independence movement toward revolutionary Marxism.

With exceptions like Corretjer and his wife (Dona Consuela Lee Corretjer, a veteran of the Communist Party of Puerto Rico), the LSP was largely populated with younger people, products of the Puerto Rican new left who viewed themselves as internationalists. Ties were developed with revolutionaries across Latin America: Abraham Guillen, a sometime anarchist in Argentina who advocated urban guerilla strategies for revolution, wrote the introduction to Corretjer's booklet *On Prolonged People's War in Puerto Rico*.

The LSP also strove to develop ties with

revolutionary elements in the growing Puerto Rican communities across North America. The Young Lords in Chicago and New York in the late 1960's represented a parallel attempt to develop a youth-oriented revolutionary organization on socialist lines within the Puerto Rican diaspora, but internal contradictions and government repression combined to limit the lifespan and potential of the Young Lords. The LSP had more success building ties with the Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional (MLN), a like-minded cadre organization formed in Chicago in 1977.

The MLN represented the most radical wing of the independence movement in the diaspora: it was comprised of (mostly younger) Leninist revolutionaries, it combined a sophisticated theoretical analysis (including a radically pro-queer plank) with an awareness of the need for mass action in Puerto Rican communities across North America, and it openly supported the clandestine armed struggle then being carried out by groups like the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN) and the Ejercito Popular Boricua - los Macheteros ("Puerto Rican Popular Army of the Machete-Wielders").

In the 1970's and early 1980's, these two groups were responsible for hundreds of bombings, expropriations, and other armed actions aimed simultaneously at building popular support for Puerto Rican independence and at raising the economic costs of US imperialism. The Macheteros operated primarily on the island (although they did carry out one of the largest armored car robberies in US history, in Connecticut, netting \$7 million on Albizu's birthday in 1983), while the FALN (which filled the role of the IRA to the MLN's Sinn Fein) operated almost exclusively on the mainland of North America, especially in New York and Chicago.

All these groups together represented only a small tendency within the relatively small independence movement in Puerto Rico and in North America, but their importance far outstripped their numbers. They lent their support to militant labor actions, feminist projects, student struggles, and ecological efforts, all of which raised their profile on the left, both on the island and in the diaspora. They attempted to integrate the national struggle with a particular vision of class struggle, along Leninist lines. Most important, they advanced a particular version of vanguardist politics, arguing that small cadre organizations (whether above- or below-ground) could inspire masses of

people while striking fear into the imperialist power structure.

The phrase most commonly used to express this notion was "Cada guaraguao tiene su pitirre" ("Every guaraguao has its pitirre"). In Puerto Rican Spanish, a guaraguao is a large hawk, while the pitirre is a small bird whose young are frequently eyed as potential food by the guaraguao. Fortunately, the pitirre is endowed with a sharp beak and claws, and when the two birds fight, the smaller one is frequently the victor. This pseudo-Darwinian David and Goliath story is usually applied to battles between Puerto Rico and the United States, but the moral was equally appreciated by the small grouping of revolutionaries battling against reactionary forces (both inside and outside the independence movement) for the hearts and minds of Puerto Ricans both on the island and in the diaspora.

The armed struggle and its above-ground advocates ran into hard times in the early 1980's, as dozens of Puerto Ricans were captured and convicted in US courts of Seditious Conspiracy and other crimes. Some refused to participate in their trials on principle, while others defended themselves in court; it made little difference, and absurdly long sentences were meted out to more than a dozen political prisoners and prisoners of war (most of whom were released by President Clinton in 1999). The clandestine organizations were fully dormant by 1990, having failed to motivate a popular movement for independence and socialism. Within a few years the LSP, MLN, and other like-minded groups were also defunct.

While it is easy to see the organizational and strategic dangers involved in prioritizing clandestine armed struggle, the real question is, was the move to armed struggle a productive error? The major problem of the Puerto Rican Leninists was their increasingly isolated position on the margins of mass social struggles in Puerto Rico and the diaspora. Nonetheless, in the development of the revolutionary struggle for Puerto Rican independence, armed struggle provided innumerable lessons to future revolutionaries, not the least of which concerns the vulnerability and resilience of the imperialist system.

It is essential to remember that revolutionaries cannot hope to defeat capitalism and the state militarily (the wishful thinking of some black bloc participants notwithstanding); only a political strategy can lead to real revolution. But, as the



Puerto Rican revolutionaries of the 1970's knew in their best moments, insurrection and armed struggle, if conducted correctly, can be part of a political strategy, not merely a military one.

## 1990-the Present: Class and Nation in the New Millennium

It has become a cliché to attribute the eclipse of Leninist models of revolution in the 1990's to the fall of the Berlin Wall. While the fortunes of Puerto Rico's Leninist left did indeed decline in the last decade, the reasons are more homegrown. From the demise of the armed struggle in the late 1980's and the election of a Statehood government in 1992, to the plebiscite and general strike of 1998 and the struggle over the island of Vieques in 1999 and 2000, history has gone beyond the outmoded models represented by Marxism in the Puerto Rican context. The result is a window of opportunity for anarchists, but the window can also be seen as a gauntlet of liberalism that threatens the future of any radical struggle in Puerto Rico, whether based in class or national identity.

The rise of the Statehood government, under governor Pedro Roselló, forced the Populares to the left once more, this time in order to consolidate their standing as a meaningful alternative to the new status quo. In the void left by the end of the armed struggle, the independence movement was unable to build a popular base outside the Populares. The most intriguing result of this vacuum was the rise of independent grassroots action against popular targets ranging from privatization to militarization. Hand in hand with this new development went the relative displacement of status issues as a basis of struggle, with the 1998 plebiscite constituting the exception that proves the rule.

In 1998, Roselló negotiated the sale of the government-owned Puerto Rico Telephone Company (PRTC) to the US based telecommunications giant GTE. This action sparked a massive backlash, including an indefinite strike of the PRTC workforce and militant actions like cutting the fiber optics cables at the Roosevelt Roads US Naval Base. The resistance culminated in a quickly planned general strike on July 7-8, which involved upwards of half

a million people across the island. While the strike was nominally coordinated by the "Broad Committee of Social Organizations" (with the great Spanish acronym CAOS), it really amounted to the simultaneous, and often spontaneous, action of hundreds of smaller organizations, including unions, student groups, radical organizations, and so on.

While the independence movement highlighted the slogan "Puerto Rico is not for sale!", the strike drew support from across the political spectrum, including commonwealth advocates and even some statehooders. Instead of a question of status, the strike is better viewed as an example of the struggles around globalization and neo-liberalism, a year and a half before Seattle brought the issue to mainstream North American awareness. The usual range of alternatives was aired, from strengthening governmental powers to

None of the Above beat all comers. The Populares claimed victory (the Party had urged its members to vote NOTA as a protest against the perceived pro-statehood slant of the language on the ballot), but the larger lesson has more to do with the displacement of status as the central issue of Puerto Rican life. National identity is alive and well in Puerto Rico, and few people support the full integration of Puerto Rico into the United States, but the traditional models of national struggle are increasingly doubted at the grassroots level.

Hot on the heels of his defeat in the plebiscite, Roselló suffered another setback in the spring of 1999, when an errant bomb killed a Puerto Rican civilian during US naval combat training on the small island of Vieques, off the east coast of the main island. For decades the Navy had occupied two thirds of Vieques, using part of the island as a bombing range for joint training exercises with NATO and other allied troops. Protests against the military presence had a long history in Vieques (including significant on-the-ground work by the LSP during the late 1970's), but the issue had never resonated with the rest of Puerto Rican society.

The death of David Sanes changed all that instantly. While the Navy voluntarily shut down the bombing range to conduct an investigation, dozens of illegal squatters' encampments sprung up across the military property in an attempt to keep the Navy from resuming operations. These actions, once again coordinated only in the loosest sense, amount-

ed to one of the largest and longest lasting land occupations ever on US government land. It took more than a year for the Navy to evict all the squatters and begin trainings again. In the meantime, a grassroots network of community, student, and radical political groups and individuals from across Puerto Rico built a massive movement against the military presence in Vieques.

The movement once again cut across status and class divisions, involving people from throughout the political spectrum and class structure in a classic popular front. The nationalist contribution to the Vieques struggle was significant, but it represented only one among several tendencies. And, compared to the general strike, there was a less clearly recognizable class basis to the movement; the population of Vieques has



*A masked protestor prepares the way for a mass trespass onto the military base on the island of Vieques*

anti-capitalist revolution. Status was part of this discussion, but had lost the spotlight.

It regained center stage later in 1998, but the results were not entirely promising to the traditional independence movement. A non-binding plebiscite was organized by Roselló's government, in an attempt to demonstrate the supposedly rising tide of statehood sentiment in Puerto Rico. In an effort to split the commonwealth vote (the independence vote having been deemed marginal at best in plebiscites of this sort), the ballot had four options: Statehood, Commonwealth, Independence, and None of the Above.

Unfortunately for Roselló, residual anger after the general strike combined with an increasing popular disdain for all status options to produce an unexpected outcome:



been economically devastated by the Naval presence, but the protests against the Navy have included participants from all classes. At the same time, the most militant actions have incorporated an anti-capitalist sentiment, tying the Navy to corporate interests in Puerto Rico. In opening the door to new conceptions of national struggle and class struggle, the struggle around Vieques, more than any other subject in the last decade, has had a forward-rather than backward-looking approach to social change.

While this context creates an obvious opening for a resurgence of Puerto Rican anarchism, no organization or tendency has emerged to fill the vacuum. Instead, the siren song of liberalism has drawn in a wide variety of former radicals. Many have accepted Commonwealth status as the best option available; Roselló lost badly in the governor's election of 2000 and has been replaced by Maria Sila Calderón, who represents the new, progressive face of the Populares. Others remain tied to old models of nationalism, whether bourgeois (like the Puerto Rican Independence Party) or social-democratic (like the Puerto Rican Socialist Party).

The situation is similar in the diaspora, where an emergent wing of the Democratic Party has attracted broad Puerto Rican support by pushing former President Clinton to release the political prisoners and prepare the way for the Navy to leave Vieques. Instead of embracing the new opportunities for revolution, large sectors of Puerto Rican radicals, both on the island and in North America, have retreated to the warmer confines of liberalism.

Despite this somewhat gloomy outlook, there is much cause for hope. Witness the grassroots upsurges of radicalism during the general strike and the Vieques struggle, along with the general dissatisfaction with all tendencies of the status quo demonstrated by the NOTA victory in the plebiscite. Popular struggles based in class and in national identity both have a future in Puerto Rico, and like all futures this one has yet to be written.

### Conclusion: Against Egotistical Conceptions

*"Those who lived and live off the ignorance of the working-class community, have they ever told the truth? No, they lied about the community's actions, and slandered its apostles! How should we understand those who oppose the ideas of equality and human freedom? As traitors*

*and Judases. All those who judge an idea to be utopian, impossible to put into practice, are obstacles, and obstacles should be pushed aside. They delay grand initiatives and good works. And still, these men call themselves patriots and fathers of the nation. What conception of the nation do they have? An egotistical one, that begins and ends in them. All of them are like this."*

- Luisa Capetillo (1911)

Nearly a century ago, Luisa Capetillo exposed a major danger of all social struggles: that of believing one's own efforts to be the beginning and ending of the struggle. While she was speaking of the early bourgeois independence movement, her criticism can be appropriately extended to the leadership of the FLT, or to the Nationalist Party, or later still to the clandestine armed struggle.

Or, Capetillo's criticism could be applied to the historic tendency of anarchism (and especially class-struggle anarchism) to deny the importance of national identities and struggles. In pairing national struggle and class struggle in the Puerto Rican experience, I have been attempting to place both in a historical context that will help us move forward as anarchist revolutionaries. This process necessarily involves de-centering ourselves, rejecting the notion that NEFAC or FRAC-GL are essential to the future of revolution in North America and elsewhere. And, while class struggle will undoubtedly be central to any revolution we might hope for, it may not have a uniquely unifying role.

None of which means we should give up our efforts. If anything, the history of the FLT and of anarchism in Puerto Rico demonstrates the necessity of explicitly anarchist organizations in all struggles. The current void in new radical politics on the island and in the diaspora only reinforces the danger: loose networks and spontaneous actions are no match for the power and inertia of liberal institutions, which can grant limited demands and defuse the larger threat presented by diffuse popular discontent. Anarchists can and must help galvanize and coordinate this discontent, and groups like NEFAC and FRAC-GL can be invaluable parts of this effort. Our chances of success are much greater, however, if we avoid messiah complexes and rigid dogma.

Earlier this year, when I asked a (non-anarchist) comrade on the island about the future of social struggles in Puerto Rico, he responded, "There is none." This depress-

ing prognosis is the legacy of failed national and class struggles and of the apparent consolidation of liberalism. One of the historic assets of anarchism has been the combination of hope and determination. If there is hope in Puerto Rico, it will be found in the determination of a new generation of militants, a few of whom, at least, might be anarchists.

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# Peter Kropotkin and Peoples' Uprisings!

## From the Paris Commune to the Kwangju Uprising

by George Katsiaficas

To more fully appreciate the contributions of Peter Kropotkin, we would be remiss if we did not attempt to extrapolate his thinking into our own time. With regard to the fate of the Bolshevik revolution, such a task is straightforward. Kropotkin himself was able to analyze its development and regression. It is quite a bit more difficult, however, to apply Kropotkin's thinking to the development of revolutionary movements in the latter half of the 20th Century.

While he is vital importance to contemporary anarchist thinking, Kropotkin is still little known outside the circles of the initiated. In South Korea, Kwangju is central to the development of modern democracy, yet the uprising of 1980, in which as many people as 2,000 people lost their lives, remains at (or outside) the borders of many people's understanding. In both cases, it seems to me that Eurocentrism plays a role in the marginalization process. I feel safe asserting that if Kropotkin had never left Russia and yet still written the same books and articles, outside of Russia we would know very little or nothing of him today!

We may forgive Kropotkin for many things. At the top of the list is his support for the Entente during World War I. Somewhere else in this list is his Eurocentric bias. Today one encounters this category of analysis in Mutual Aid with consternation. His use of "savages" and "barbarians" is curiously antiquated. Moreover, in his *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, we find oblique references to "Asiatic schemes," mentions of "[...] an Oriental fashion, in an abominable way" and "oriental amusements were looked upon with disgust..." [*Memoirs*, pp. 76, 82, 310]. I assume that Kropotkin would have outgrown these prejudices. In his own day, they were seldom questioned.

Kropotkin was, if anything, an internationalist. Considering the role of *Le Revolte*, the Swiss paper he edited, he

wrote: "To make one feel sympathy with the throbbing of the human heart, with its revolt against age-long injustice, with its attempts at working out new forms of life, -- this should be the chief duty of a revolutionary paper. It is hope, not despair, which makes successful revolutions" [*Memoirs*, pp. 418]

### KROPOTKIN'S NOTION OF REVOLUTION

Alongside the Russian Revolution, and his experiences in Western Europe, Kropotkin developed his analysis of revolution mainly in relation to movements in France, especially the Revolution of 1789-93 and the Paris Commune of 1871. For Kropotkin, the free commune became the ends and means of genuine revolution. He detested representative government and those bureaucrats who sought to take upon themselves the responsibilities and rights of the people. More than once, he blasted those who would sit, like generals from afar, and give directives to movements in the streets [*Memoirs*, p. 282]. One can only imagine what he would have to say about those who sit home today during demonstrations and tomorrow write "handbooks" full of advice for activists. In his own day, he participated in armed demonstrations and thematized cowardice as necessary to overcome inside the movement [*Memoirs*, p. 419].

Kropotkin's faith in ordinary people was boundless. Admiring the "spontaneous organization shown by the people of Paris" in the French Revolution, he noted that each section of the city appointed its own military and civil committee, but "it was the General Assemblies, held in the evening, that all important questions were generally referred" [*The Great French Revolution*, p. 313]. Over time, observed Kropotkin, these sections were transformed into arms of the Committee of Public Safety (i.e. into instru-

ments of the State). As 40,000 revolutionary committees were swallowed by the State, the revolution was killed.

The sacrifices of thousands of people who lost their lives in revolutionary movements revealed to Kropotkin the form in which a genuine revolution would appear: the "independent commune." Throughout his writings, Kropotkin understood democratic republics and representative governments as fulfilling the ambitions of middle class radicals, of those who wanted reform of the existing system in order to improve their individual lot rather than to revolutionize all of the existing social order [*Conquest of Bread*, p. 44, 213-14]. "Representative government has accomplished its historic mission; it has given a mortal blow to court-rule." [*Anarchist Communism*, p. 68]. "Absolute monarchy corresponded to the system of serfdom. Representative government corresponds to the system of capital-rule." [*Anarchist Communism*, p. 52]

Developing his thoughts in relation to the Paris Commune of 1871, he wrote:

*"The uprising of the Paris Commune thus brought with it the solution of a question, which tormented every true revolutionist. Twice had France tried to achieve some sort of socialist revolution by imposing it through a central government more or less disposed to accept it: in 1793-94, when she tried to introduce l'egalite de fait - real economic equality - by means of strong Jacobin measures; and in 1848, when she tried to impose a 'Democratic Socialist Republic.' And each time she failed But now a new solution was indicated: the free commune must do it on its own territory..."* [*Modern Science and Anarchism*, p. 164]

The political form of a free society for Kropotkin clearly was the independent commune. "This was the form the social revolution must take - the independent



commune. Let all the country and all the world be against it; but once its inhabitants have decided that they will communalize the consumption of commodities, their exchange and their production, they must realize it among themselves." [Modern Science and Anarchism, p. 164]. In his understanding of the Paris Commune and the Cartagena and Barcelona Communes that followed on its heels, Kropotkin fleshed out the meaning of the Commune as a political form, projecting it into the future:

*"If we analyze not only this movement in itself, but also the impression it left in the minds and the tendencies manifested during the communal revolution, we must recognize in it an indication showing that in the future human agglomerations which are more advanced in their social development will try to start an independent life; and that they will endeavor to convert the more backwards parts of a nation by example, instead of imposing their opinions by law and force, or by submitting themselves to majority-rule, which always is mediocrity-rule. At the same time, the failure of representative government within the Commune itself proved that self-government and self-administration must be carried further than in a mere territorial sense. To be effective they must also be carried into the various functions of life within a free community."* [Anarchist Communism, pp. 51-2]

In a later work, Kropotkin proclaimed that after 1871, "... the free commune would be henceforth the medium in which the ideas of modern socialism may come to realization." And in Mutual Aid, he traces the form which communal cooperation has taken in evolution and history.

After 1917, he moved back to Russia. Although critical of the Bolsheviks, he published only two short statements about the revolution, mainly aimed at undermining the counter-revolutionary, foreign armies being sent to Russia. He did, however, indicate again support for the free commune:

*"All efforts to reunite under a central control the naturally separate parts of the Russian Empire are predestined to failure... I see the time coming when each part of this federation will be itself a federation of free communes and free cities. And I believe also that certain parts of Western Europe will soon follow the same course."* [Kropotkin, Letter to the Workers of Western Europe]

In relation to all the revolutions of his time, he established the goal of genuine freedom as the independent commune. But how were people to accomplish this goal? What means were to be used? For Kropotkin, the answer was clear: uprisings would prepare the ground. Uprisings and the free commune were essential to Kropotkin because he believed the people themselves must make their own revolution - not a vanguard party or any otherwise organized small group. For popular mobilization, nothing was more important than a central meeting place, as for example, the Palais Royal during the French Revolution:

*"The Palais Royal, with its gardens and cafes, had become an open air club, whither ten thousand persons of all classes went everyday to exchange news, to discuss the pamphlets of the hour, to renew among the crowd their ardor for future action, to know and to understand one another."* [Great French Revolution, p. 61]

One example of the importance of meeting places for popular mobilization was on June 10, 1789. After learning that eleven soldiers had been arrested and imprisoned for refusing to load their muskets to use against the citizens of Paris, over 4,000 people went immediately from the Palais Royal to rescue the soldiers. Seeing such a large force, the jailers complied, and the dragoons, riding at full speed to stop the crowd, quickly sheathed their sabers and fraternized with the people. [Great French Revolution, p. 69] Admiring the spontaneous militancy of people in the streets, Kropotkin noted that thievery ended - that crowds in control of shops did not loot - but only took what was necessary for their collective nourishment and defense. [Great French Revolution, p. 75, 106] As the revolt spread from one city to another - from Paris to much of France, "All Europe was moved to enthusiasm over the words and deeds of the revolution," Kropotkin traced how the revolts unified France in ways previously not imagined.

[Great French Revolution, pp. 95, 177]

After the Paris Commune of 1871, when similar uprisings occurred in Cartagena and Barcelona in Spain, he came close to understanding that uprisings themselves inspired others to rise up - a phenomenon I understand as the eros effect. [See my book, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968*] Kropotkin noted that uprisings, while often the product of desperation, were essential to revolution:

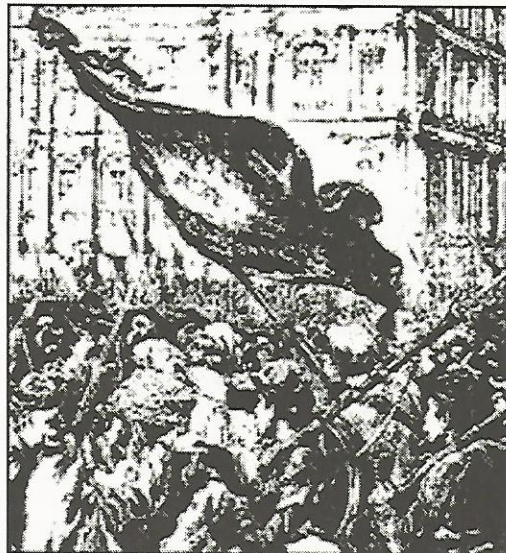
*"They also rebelled - sometimes in hope of local success - in strikes or in small revolts against some official whom they disliked, or in order to get food for their hungry children, but frequently also without any hope of success: simply because the conditions grew unbearable. Not one, or two, or tens, but hundreds of similar revolts*

*have preceded and must precede every revolution. Without these no revolution was ever wrought."* [Kropotkin, *Modern Science and Anarchism*]

He later proclaimed uprisings to be not only the means but also the key to determining the ends of the revolution: "And it may be stated as a general rule that the character of every revolution is determined by the character and the aim of the uprisings by which it preceded."

With these thoughts in mind, I now turn to the Kwangju Uprising of 1980, which offers empirical verification of Kropotkin's ideas. Despite its central importance to Korean and Asian democracy movements in the 1980s, many people are unfamiliar with the Kwangju Uprising. I will first offer a brief summary, after which I will portray elements of the uprising especially important to what I have described as Kropotkin's view of the free commune and uprisings in general.

Fundamentally a humanitarian, Kropotkin understood the death and depravity faced by those courageous enough to rise up. Unafraid to maintain his principled opposition to capital-rule despite imprisonment and deprivation, he refused



*The Paris Commune of 1871*



to allow the sacrifices of others to be forgotten. Reading his description of the brutality of government, it is difficult to tell whether it occurred in Paris or Kwangju:

*"You shall perish, whatever you do! If you are taken with arms in your hands, death! If you beg for mercy, death! Whichever way you turn, right, left, back, forward, up, down, death! You are not merely outside the law, you are outside humanity. Neither age nor sex shall save you and yours. You shall die, but first you shall taste the agony of your wife, your sister, your sons and daughters, even those in the cradle! Before your eyes the wounded man shall be taken out of the ambulance and hacked with bayonets or knocked down with the butt end of a rifle. He shall be dragged living by his broken leg or bleeding arm and flung like a suffering, groaning bundle of refuse into the gutter. Death! Death! Death!"* [Peter Kropotkin, *Commune of Paris, 1895*]

## KWANGJU UPRISING

In the past two centuries, two events stand out as unique beacons of the spontaneous ability of thousands of ordinary people to govern themselves: the Paris Commune of 1871, and the Kwangju People's Uprising of 1980. In both cities, an unarmed citizenry, in opposition to their own governments, effectively gained control of urban space and held it despite the presence of well-armed military forces seeking to re-establish "law and order"; hundreds of thousands of people rose to the occasion and created popular organs of political power that effectively and efficiently replaced traditional forms of government; crime rates plummeted during the period of liberation; and people felt previously unexperienced forms of kinship with each other.

The liberated realities of the Communes in Paris and Kwangju contradict the widely propagated myth that human beings are essentially evil and therefore require strong governments to maintain order and justice. Rather, the behavior of the citizens during these moments of liberation revealed an innate capacity for self-government and cooperation. It was the forces of the government, not the ungoverned people that acted with great brutality and injustice.

Events in Kwangju unfolded after the dictator of South Korea; Park Chung-Hee was assassinated by his own chief of intelligence. In the euphoria after Park's demise, students led a huge movement for

democracy, but General Chun Doo-Hwan seized power and threatened violence if the protests continued. All over Korea, with the sole exception of Kwangju, people stayed indoors. With the approval of the United States, the new military government then released from the frontlines of the DMZ some of the most seasoned paratroopers to teach Kwangju a lesson. Once these troops reached Kwangju, they terrorized the population in unimaginable ways. In the first confrontations on the morning of May 18, specially designed clubs broke heads of defenseless students. As demonstrators scrambled for safety and regrouped, the paratroopers viciously attacked: "A cluster of troops attacked each student individually. They would crack his head, stomp his back, and kick him in the face. When the soldiers were done, he looked like a pile of clothes in meat sauce." [Lee Jae-Eui, *Kwangju Diary: Beyond Death, Beyond the Darkness of the Age*, p. 46] Bodies were piled into trucks, where soldiers continued to beat and kick them. By night the paratroopers had set up camp at several universities.

As students fought back, soldiers used bayonets on them and arrested dozens more people, many of whom were stripped naked, raped and further brutalized. One soldier brandished his bayonet at captured students and screamed at them, "This is the bayonet I used to cut forty Viet Cong women's breasts [in Vietnam]!" The entire population was in shock from the paratroopers' over-reaction. The paratroopers were so out of control that they even stabbed to death the director of information of the police station who tried to get them to stop brutalizing people. [*Kwangju Diary*, p. 79]

Despite severe beatings and hundreds of arrests, students continually regrouped and tenaciously fought back. As the city mobi-

lized the next day, people from all walks of life dwarfed the number of students among the protesters. [*The May 18 Kwangju Democratic Uprising*, p. 127] This spontaneous generation of a peoples' movement transcended traditional divisions between

town and gown, one of the first indications of the generalization of the revolt. Paratroopers once again resorted to callous brutality - killing and maiming people whom they happened to encounter on the streets. Even cab and bus drivers seeking to aid the wounded and bleeding people were stabbed, beaten and sometimes killed. Some policemen secretly tried to release captives, and they, too, were bayoneted. [*Kwangju Diary*, p. 113] Many police simply went home, and the chief of police refused to order his men to fire on protesters despite the military's insistence he do so.

People fought back with stones, bats, knives, pipes, iron bars and ham-

mers against 18,000 riot police and over 3,000 paratroopers. Although many people were killed, the city refused to be quieted. On May 20, a newspaper called the *Militants' Bulletin* was published for the first time, providing accurate news - unlike the official media. At 5:50pm, a crowd of 5,000 surged over a police barricade. When the paratroopers drove them back, they reassembled and sat-in on a road. They then selected representatives to try and further split the police from the army. In the evening, the march swelled to over 200,000 people in a city with a population then of 700,000. The massive crowd unified workers, farmers, students and people from all walks of life. Nine buses and over two-hundred taxis led the procession on Kumnam Avenue, the downtown shopping area. Once again, the paratroopers viciously attacked, and this time the whole city fought back. During the night, cars, jeeps, taxis and other vehicles were set on fire and pushed into the military's forces. Although the army attacked repeatedly, the evening ended in a stalemate at Democracy Square. At the train station, many demonstrators were killed, and at



**Mass demonstrations fill the streets of Kwangju, May 18, 1980**



Province Hall adjacent to Democracy Square, the paratroopers opened fire on the crowd with M-16s, killing many more.

The censored media had failed to report the killings. Instead, false reports of vandalism and minor police actions were the news that they fabricated. The brutality of the army was not mentioned. After the night's news again failed to report the situation, thousands of people surrounded the MBC media building. Soon the management of the station and the soldiers guarding it retreated, and the crowd surged inside. Unable to get the broadcast facility working, people torched the building. The crowd targeted buildings intelligently:

*"At 1:00am, citizens went in flocks to the Tax Office, broke its furniture and set fire to it. The reason was that taxes which should be used for people's lives and welfare had been used for the army and the production of the arms to kill and beat people. It was a very unusual case to set fire to the broadcasting stations and tax office while protecting the police station and other buildings." [The May 18 Kwangju Democratic Uprising, p. 138]*

Besides the Tax Office and two media buildings, the Labor Supervision Office, Province Hall car depot and 16 police vehicles were torched. The final battle at the train station around 4:00am was intense. Soldiers again used M-16s against the crowd, killing many in the front ranks. Others climbed over the bodies to carry the fight to the army. With incredible fortitude, the people prevailed, and the army beat a hasty retreat.

At 9:00am the next morning (May 21), more than 100,000 people gathered again on Kumam Avenue facing the paratroopers. A small group shouted that some people should go to Asia Motors (a military contractor) and seize vehicles. A few dozen people went off, bringing back only seven (the exact number of rebels who knew how to drive). As they shuttled more drivers back and forth, soon 350 vehicles, including armored personnel carriers, were in the hands of the people. Driving these expropriated vehicles around the city, the demonstrators rallied the populace and

also went to neighboring towns and villages to spread the revolt. Some trucks brought bread and drinks from the Coca Cola factory. Negotiators were selected by the crowd and sent to the military. Suddenly gunshots pierced an already thick atmosphere, ending hope for a peaceful settlement. For ten minutes, the army indiscriminately fired, and in carnage, dozens were killed and over 500 wounded.

The people quickly responded. Less than two hours after the shootings, the first police station was raided for arms. More people formed action teams and raided police and national guard armories, and assembled at two central points. With assistance from coal miners from Hwasun, demonstrators obtained large quantities of dynamite and detonators. [The May 18



**Kwangju: The People Armed**

*Kwangju Democratic Uprising, p.143]* Seven busloads of women textile workers drove to Naju, where they captured hundreds of rifles and ammunition and brought them back to Kwangju. Similar arms seizures occurred in Changsong, Yoggwang and Tamyang counties. The movement quickly spread to Hwasun, Naju, Hampyung, Youngkwang, Kangjin, Mooan, Haenam, Mokpo - in all, at least sixteen other parts of southwest Korea. [The May 18 Kwangju Democratic Uprising, p. 164] The rapid proliferation of the revolt is another indication of people's capacity for self-government and autonomous initiative. Hoping to bring the uprising to Chunju and Seoul, some demonstrators set out but were repulsed by troops blocking the highway, roads, and railroads. Helicopter gun-

ships wiped out units of armed demonstrators from Hwasun and Yoggwang counties trying to reach Kwangju. If the military had not so tightly controlled the media and restricted travel, the revolt may have turned into a nationwide uprising.

In the heat of the moment, a structure evolved that was more democratic than previous administrations of the city. Assembling at Kwangju Park and Yu-tong Junction, combat cells and leadership formed. Machine guns were brought to bear on Province Hall (where the military had its command post). By 5:30pm, the army retreated; by 8:00pm the people controlled the city. Cheering echoed everywhere. Although their World War II weapons were far inferior to those of the army, people's bravery and sacrifices

proved more powerful than the technical superiority of the army. The Free Commune lasted for six days. Daily citizens' assemblies gave voice to years-old frustration and deep aspirations of ordinary people. Local citizens' groups maintained order and created a new type of social administration - one of, by and for the people. Coincidentally, on May 27 - the same day that the Paris Commune was crushed over a hundred years earlier - the Kwangju Commune was overwhelmed by military force despite heroic resistance. Although brutally suppressed in 1980, for the next seven years the movement

continued to struggle, and in 1987 a nationwide uprising was organized that finally won democratic electoral reform in South Korea.

Like the battleship Potemkin, the people of Kwangju have repeatedly signaled the advent of revolution in South Korea - from the 1894 Tonghak rebellion and the 1929 student revolt to the 1980 uprising. Like the Paris Commune and the battleship Potemkin, Kwangju's historical significance is international, not simply Korean (or French, or Russian). Its meaning and lessons apply equally well to East and West, North and South. The 1980 peoples' uprising, like these earlier symbols of revolution, has already had worldwide repercussions. After decades in which basic democratic rights was repressed throughout East Asia,



a wave of revolts and uprisings transformed the region. The 1989 revolutions in Europe are well known, but Eurocentrism often prevents comprehension of their Asian counterparts. Six years after the Kwangju Uprising, the Marcos dictatorship was overthrown in the Philippines. Aquino and Kim Dae-Jung had known each other in the United States, and the experiences of the Kwangju helped to inspire action in Manila. All through Asia, peoples' movements for democracy and human rights

*"For days, citizens voluntarily cleaned the streets, cooked rice, served free meals in the marketplace, and kept constant guard against the expected counter-attack. Everyone contributed to and found their place in liberated Kwangju."*

appeared: an end to martial law was won in Taiwan in 1987; in Burma a popular movement exploded in March 1988, when students and ethnic minorities took to the streets of Rangoon. Despite horrific repression, the movement compelled President Ne Win to step down after 26-years of rule. The next year, student activists in China activated a broad public cry for democracy, only to be shot down at Tiananmen Square and hunted for years afterward. Nepal's turn was next. Seven weeks of protests beginning in April 1990 compelled the king to democratize the government. The next country to experience an explosion was Thailand, when twenty days of hunger strike by a leading opposition politician brought hundreds of thousands of people in the streets in May 1992. Dozens were killed when the military suppressed street demonstrations, and because of the brutality General Suchinda Krapayoon was forced to step down. In 1998 in Indonesia, students called for "people-power revolution" and were able to overthrow Suharto. Interviews conducted by an American correspondent at the universities in Indonesia determined that the people-power slogan was adopted from the Philippines, as was the tactical innovation of the occupation of public space.

## KROPOTKIN AND KWANGJU

There are three principal ways in which the Kwangju Uprising illuminates and verifies Kropotkin's framework of analysis:

(1) *The independent commune and free distribution of commodities*

After the military had been driven out

of the city on May 21, everyone shared joy and relief. Markets and stores were reopened for business, and food, water, and electricity were available as normally. No banks were looted and normal crimes like robbery, rape or theft hardly occurred - if at all. Coffins, gasoline and cigarettes

were in short supply. While some people attempted to procure more coffins from the army, the CA rationed gasoline, and people shared cigarettes with their newly found comrades in arms, happy to be alive. For some people, sharing cigarettes symbolized an important part of the communal experience. Storeowners who still had cigarettes often sold - or gave away - one pack at a time (to be fair to everyone). Blood was in short supply at the hospital, but as soon as the need became known, people flooded in to donate it, including barmaids and prostitutes, who at one point publicly insisted that they, too, be permitted to donate. Thousands of dollars was quickly raised through donations. All these examples are indications of how remarkably the whole city came together.

For days, citizens voluntarily cleaned the streets, cooked rice, served free meals in the marketplace, and kept constant guard against the expected counter-attack. Everyone contributed to and found their place in liberated Kwangju. Spontaneously a new division of labor emerged. The citizens' army, many of whom had stayed up all night, nonetheless was models of responsibility. People dubbed the new militia the "Citizens' Army" or "our allies" (as opposed to the army, "our enemy"). They protected the people and the people, in turn, took care of them. Without any indoctrination and none of the military madness that elicits monstrous behavior in armies around the world, the men and women of the CA behaved in an exemplary fashion. Unafraid to impose a new type of order based on the needs of the populace, they disarmed all middle school and high school students, an action for which the

Militant's Bulletin too responsibility. [Kwangju Diary, p. 71] When the final assault was imminent, their leaders insisted that the high schoolers among the militants return home so they could survive and continue the struggle. After many protests and with tears in their eyes, the younger militants departed.

(2) *General assemblies at Democracy Square, not representative government, was the highest decision-making body*

Popular will was directly formulated at daily rallies around the fountain at Province Hall Square. Renamed "Democracy Square" on May 16, the space was holy even before the liberation of the city. The ability to assemble peacefully by the thousands was a right won through the blood of too many friends and neighbors. Instinctively, the people of Kwangju recognized the square as their spiritual home, and they assembled there every day by the tens of thousands. The daily rallies became the setting for a new kind of direct democracy where everyone had a say. Women's public roles were impressive, standing in sharp contrast to the everyday subordination they suffered. Many people were able to express heartfelt needs:

*"The foundation was now the center of unity. All walks and classes of people spoke - women street vendors, elementary school teachers, followers of different religions, housewives, college students, high school students and farmers. Their angry speeches created a common consciousness, a manifestation of the tremendous energy of the uprising. They had melded together, forging a strong sense of solidarity throughout the uprising. For the moment, the city was one." [Kwangju Diary, p. 105]*

Five rallies occurred during the time the city was liberated, and huge crowds attended each. The first massive rally was a spontaneously organized gathering to celebrate the defeat of the military the day after the army retreated. The next day (May 23), at the First Citywide Rally for Democracy, the crowd swelled to 150,000. It ended with the people singing, "Our Wish is National Unification." On May 24, over 100,000 people assembled; there were 50,000 on May 25 (where the resignation of the Settlement Committee was demanded); and 30,000 at the end of the final rally on May 26. At this last gathering,



the demand for a new government of national salvation emerged.

## (3) Spontaneous organization

The capacity for self-organization that emerged spontaneously, first in the heat of the battle and later in the governing of the city and the final resistance when the military counter-attacked, is mind-expanding. In the later part of the 20th Century, high rates of literacy, the mass media, and universal education (which in South Korea includes military training for every man) have forged a capacity in millions of people to govern themselves far more wisely than the tiny elites all too often ensconced in powerful positions. We can observe this spontaneous capacity for self-government (as well as the deadly absurdity of elite rule) in the events of the Kwangju Uprising.

In Kwangju, no pre-existing armed force like the Parisian National Guard led the assault on power. Rather a spontaneous process of resistance to the brutality of the paratroopers threw forward men and women who rose to the occasion. Many had little or no previous political experience. Some had little or no formal education. All emerged in the concrete context of unfolding historical events. Liberated Kwangju was organized without the contrivance of governments or planning by political parties. Kropotkin would have made no less of those who responded to the call to seize vehicles at the rally on Kumnam Street than he did of the crowd from the Palais Royal freeing the prisoners.

Not only was there no pre-existing organization to stage a coup d'etat, almost all the leaders of the movement were either arrested or in hiding when the uprising began. On the night of May 17, military intelligence personnel and police raided homes of activists across the city, arresting the leadership of the movement. Those leaders not picked up went into hiding. Already at least twenty-six of the movement's national leaders (including Kim Dae-Jung) had been rounded up. Nonetheless the very next morning, people spontaneously organized themselves - first by the hundreds and then by the thousands.

The emergence of organization appears to have happened quite naturally. The process was obvious to everyone. Even the government publicly referred to the uprising as "community self-rule". At about

10:30am on May 22, a group of eight evangelical pastors met to appraise the situation. One of them was Arnold Peterson, a U.S. Baptist missionary who happened to be in Kwangju. He later remembered the pastors' appraisal:

*"The consensus of their feeling is summed up in the phrase 'This cannot be.' It was unheard of that the citizens of a city should rise up and throw off their government with no conscious planning and leadership."* [Peterson, p. 49]

There were a small number of pre-existing groups like Wildfire (a night school for workers), Clown (an activist theatrical troupe), and the National Democratic Workers' League, whose members came together to publish a daily newspaper, the Militants' Bulletin, which they used to stiffen and inspire the armed resistance. They successfully outmaneuvered the mayor and more conservative members of the council. Making an alliance with the emergent groups of armed fighters, they created an energy center, as a spectrum of militant individuals merged together and devoted themselves to a single focus - continued armed resistance.

Significantly, many of the members of this more militant group had previously participated in study groups about the Paris Commune, some with poet and activist Kim Nam-Ju. [Interview, November 29, 1999] In 2001, I conducted twenty-nine interviews with participants in the uprising, and many persons indicated that they had been part of study groups that for a time focused on the Paris Commune before the Kwangju Uprising. Yoon Sang-won (one of the key leaders that emerged in liberated Kwangju) attended a 1976 speech given by Kim Nam-Ju at Nokdu bookstore in which he discussed the Paris Commune. [Interview, November 7, 2001] During the uprising, Yoon Sang-won spoke publicly at least once about the Paris Commune in his discussions with other leading members of the university. [Interview, June 22, 2001] At least a dozen other key activists had studied the Paris Commune.

That activists studied the Paris Commune prior to the Kwangju Uprising illustrates how the legacy of uprisings, whether in Paris or Kwangju, consciously or not is to empower the human species to struggle against oppression. Even when an uprising is brutally suppressed - as in both cases here - their being experienced publicly creates new desires and new needs, new fears and new

hopes in the hearts and minds of participants and all those standing in the path of the ripples sent out by the uprisings.

## CONCLUDING COMMENT

These brief remarks on the Kwangju Uprising indicate how much Kropotkin's thinking continues to offer revolutionary movements. To his credit, his categories of analysis, gleaned from the blood and sacrifices of so many, remain germane to contemporary struggles.

While Kropotkin's insights have relevance today, it would be foolish to apply mechanically his thinking. Particularly when the cost of error can be thousands of lives, revolutionary theory, while bringing to consciousness the legacy of previous waves of revolution, should empower people to create their own destiny.

Happily, one way in which Kropotkin was wrong was his statement that bloody agents of repression "never are arraigned" [Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets, p. 138]. Incredibly, after the victory of the June 1987 struggle in South Korea, former presidents Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae-woo (masterminds of the Kwangju Massacre) were both tried and imprisoned. Seldom in history have the authors of such bloodshed been held responsible. Let us hope that in the future, Kropotkin's dream of freedom and prosperity will replace our current nightmare of corporate domination, war and militarism.

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# TO EACH ACCORDING TO NEED:

## AN ANARCHIST LOOK AT COMMUNIST ECONOMICS

by Geoff

### Introduction

Capitalism is, fundamentally, an economic system; that is, a particular way of organizing the production and distribution of commodities across broad societies. Why then are so many revolutionary anarchists openly and militantly anti-capitalist yet simultaneously so loathe to seriously consider economics? Surely part of the problem is an often knee-jerk reaction on the part of many anarchists against the perceived "authoritarianism" of the best-known critic of capitalism as an economic order: Karl Marx.

While there is much to be critical of in Marx's works, and revolutionary anarchists should be proud of the long, and often bloody, history our movement has of resisting the reactionary tendencies within self-proclaimed "communist" ideology, I think many anarchists who have not read much Marx would be truly surprised by how *little* Marx focuses on what *communism* would be like. Many have focused their critiques on phrases like "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" to illustrate a case against Marx, and in doing so have done a great disservice to the anarchist movement as a whole. Not only are such phrases generally taken out of context, they were coined long before the body of Marx's work was written, and long before he made some of his most significant discoveries regarding the functioning of capitalism. From this perspective, Marx's most significant work was likely *Capital*, which gives the fullest expression to Marx's ideas and provides the most profound and systematic critique of capitalism. Significantly, Marx refuses to define what he means by "communism" despite using the term repeatedly, except in the negative sense of how communism would differ from capitalism. The indication here is clear: criticisms of Marx which focus on how he allegedly envisioned communism have little basis in Marx's actual writings.

Virtually all early anarchists, including Marx's longtime critic Mikhail Bakunin, recognized the value of Marx's "materialism," as well as his specific critique of capitalism.

It is imperative to recognize, as they did, that Marx's critique of capitalism provides a unique view of modern economic relations, the validity of which is difficult to dispute. Rather than reject outright all of Marx's contributions to an understanding of our world, as many anarchists are inclined to do, we should allow ourselves to appropriate those elements of Marx's analysis that are most valid and are the most useful in explaining how capitalism continues to function today. Refusing to do so has led the anarchist movement to have only the cloudiest sense of economics, often tainted by liberalism, and has long hindered us from being able to predict or understand the evolution of our enemy.

This article aims to expose revolutionary anarchists to the basic economic principles upon which capitalism is built, so that we may better understand the nature of our exploitation and how to resist it. To illustrate the applicability of these principles, they will be explained in the context of one of the most difficult questions to face revolutionary anarchists: how would the economic base of an anarchist-communist society function? I make no claims that this information is particularly innovative, only that it is relevant. My hope is merely to provide a basis upon which the anarchist movement in general can build a more informed critique of capitalism. As they say, you must learn to crawl before you can walk.

### THE BASICS

Before we can really delve too far into the mysterious world of Marx we must first establish some of the fundamentals of Marx's analysis. Often, those who first attempt to read Marx are immediately discouraged by his extensive use of jargon and mathematical formulas. Unfortunately, it is also extremely difficult to use Marx's methods of analysis without simultaneously repeating many of the same obscure terms. For this reason, most writers who continue to build their analysis using Marx's terms, as I will as well, making their ideas difficult to understand for the uninitiated. All

of Marx's concepts are extremely complex, and I encourage those who find this material especially interesting to turn to Marx himself for more precise definitions. I seek here only to give a firm grasp of his most fundamental ideas so that we may use them in our own analyses.

Perhaps the single most important concept which Marx ever expounded was the idea of **surplus value**. Since Marx believed that all value was created by labor<sup>[1]</sup>, he was immediately confronted with the question of how the capitalist - that is, the owner of the means of production - could make a profit if all value came from the labor of his employees. Marx solved this problem by recognizing that labor was really just a commodity, which he called labor-power, and that the owner of labor-power (i.e. the individual laborer) sold this commodity to the capitalist in exchange for a wage.

Labor-power, like all commodities, has two distinct values: use-value and exchange-value; use-value is simply what the commodity is used for, whereas exchange-value is similar (though not exactly equivalent) to a commodity's price, and is a measure of how much labor went into creating that commodity. An easy way to conceptualize this is thusly: a car's use-value is that it transports you from place to place very quickly, while its exchange-value is \$14,000 which represents, say, 200 hours of work that went into building the car. What makes the commodity labor-power different from all other commodities, is that its use-value is the only one capable of actually creating new value. Labor-power's exchange-value, however, is simply what it costs to keep the laborer alive and capable of continuing to work (though the specific price of labor-power may fluctuate); also called the value of the means of subsistence.

The cost of keeping a laborer alive is essentially the same regardless of how many hours s/he works however, and this is precisely how the capitalist is able to make a profit. Every day that the laborer works, therefore, is essentially divided into two parts: the time it takes to reproduce the



value that s/he consumes each day, and the excess time beyond that. This division can be expressed in any unit of work, whether piece-meal work, hourly wages, or set salary. The time required to reproduce necessities is called "necessary labor time" while the excess time the laborer spends working is called "surplus labor time" and the value which is created through this surplus labor time is called "surplus value." The overall time required to constantly reproduce all the commodities which society as a whole consumes, is called the "total socially necessary labor time." [2]

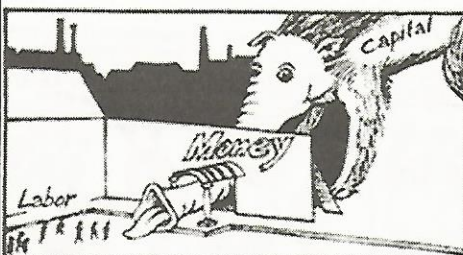
It is important to note that surplus value is not the same thing as "profit." Profit represents the amount of money which a capitalist makes after deducting the costs of workers in wages, raw materials, and production overhead (such as rent, cost of electricity, etc.) whereas surplus value represents the level of exploitation of the workers - the number of hours they work that produce value beyond what they are paid.

According to Marx, there are two main ways in which surplus value is created, and it is important that we distinguish between them. The first, which we have alluded to above, is what Marx called "absolute surplus value" and revolves around the actual length of the standard work day. In most advanced capitalist societies, the issue of absolute surplus value has seemingly been resolved, with the institutionalization of officially recognized standard hours for work-days and work-weeks. However, the concept of absolute surplus value remains an important one for several reasons. Although the matter has officially been resolved with the standardization of the working-day, it is important to remember that the capitalist still extracts surplus value from this relationship, he is simply constrained from amplifying the magnitude of this extraction any further than the social and legal norm. As a result of this, we find that the matter really is not settled at all, but rather remains an issue of contention between the proletariat and capitalists. Thus, in the U.S. we continue to see slow but steady extensions in the normal working day for most people, even if the legal working-day has not changed, and now new legislation proposals that would officially extend the length of the normal work-week. In many ways, the length of the working day is a perpetual arena of struggle between the two classes, and therefore serves as a litmus test for the strength of each class respectively.

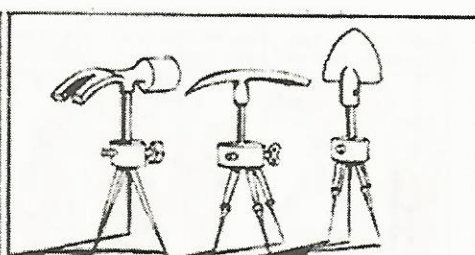
"The other form which the creation of surplus value can take Marx called "relative surplus value." Fundamentally, the process of producing relative surplus value differs from that of producing absolute surplus value in that it tackles the other part of the capitalist's problem: the cost of labor. By reducing the cost of labor's reproduction, the capitalist is able to reduce the necessary labor time required for a worker's subsistence, and thus, although the hours a worker labors remain constant, the ratio of necessary to surplus labor time is altered, thereby creating more surplus value for the capitalist. Since the value of labor-power is the equivalent of the value of the means of subsistence, it is only by decreasing the

value of the means of subsistence that relative surplus value can be created. Further, it is only through an increase in the productivity in some field related to the means of subsistence that the value of those means can be reduced. Thus, it is only through increases in productivity that capitalists are able to expand the rate of accumulation of relative surplus value. It is worth noting that while the production of absolute surplus value is bounded by physical limitations imposed by the number of hours in a day and the number of hours a worker can labor before dying or collapsing, the production of relative surplus value is almost limitless. Thus, we can expect the behavior patterns and modes of operation arising out

## CAPITALIST EXPLOITATION FOR BEGINNERS...



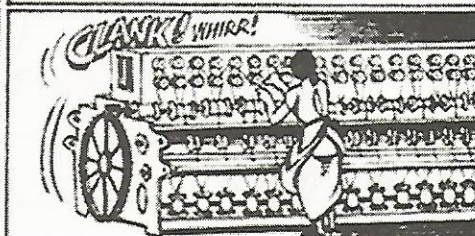
All wealth comes from labor. So private property is the expropriation of the products of labor by one class from another.



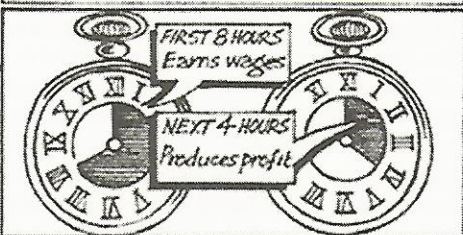
Under capitalism it appears that wealth creates wealth. Relations between individuals appear as relations between things.



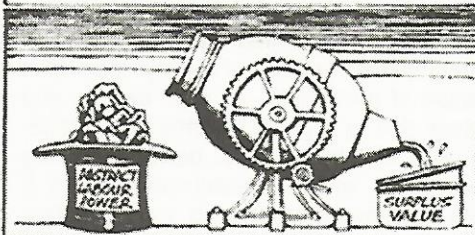
Labor too appears as a thing, a commodity (labor-power), which the laborer sells to the capitalist in a supposedly free exchange.



The worker works to survive and the capitalist works to produce profit. Only the capitalist doesn't so much work as control the means of production.



The worker sells their labor-power for its value, which is the cost of its reproduction, but produces more than this, which is surplus value.



This surplus value is where the capitalist gets their profit. The key to it all is therefore the extraction of SURPLUS VALUE from abstract labor-power.



of the means by which relative surplus value is created to be more widespread, more enduring, and to have deeper effects than those produced by the production of absolute surplus value.

Now that we have covered some of the most important of Marx's basic precepts, we are still left with questions regarding the applicability of these conceptions. Let us now turn our attention to the realm of actual production, and see what kind of conclusions we can reach about an economic basis for anarchist-communism from Marx's analytical tools.

## THE MATERIAL BASIS OF FUTURE COMMUNISM

As we have discussed above, Marx rarely ventured more than a few steps into the misty depths of *what could be*, or *what would be*, after a communist revolution. To a certain degree, this was merely a recognition on Marx's part that he simply did not know what communism would absolutely

established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things."<sup>[4]</sup> Given this definition, what can we say today, after more than one hundred and fifty years of proletarian struggle, about the material basis of a future communist society?

When Marx spoke of his vision of a communist society, the abolition of capitalist division of labor took a central role in his thinking. Marx acknowledged the benefits which a division of labor had given society in terms of productivity and technological advances; what he rejected was not the continued division of tasks, but the subjugation of humanity to its own forms of activity which has resulted in individuals being locked into the division of labor. Themselves an expression of that division, individuals in turn become defined by it: not an individual who works, but first and foremost a *worker*, and increasingly, a particular type of worker. At his most inspiring, Marx asserts that in a communist society,

Is this vision really nothing more than romantic utopianism? I claim that it is not. Central to Marx's assertions about the end of the capitalist division of labor, is the belief that gains in productivity and technology will both minimize the overall amount of socially necessary labor time and de-skill production to the point where virtually anyone is capable of engaging in most necessary forms of production. Once the overall necessary labor time, that is, the labor time needed to simply reproduce the social goods which society consumes, has been reduced to a minimum, individuals would be free to engage in any number of pursuits suited to their individuality.

From an examination of recent census data, we see that the first part of this process has largely been accomplished, and that overall necessary labor time has reached an historic low. From a basic understanding of the difference between necessary and surplus labor time<sup>[6]</sup>, we can derive the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Variable Capital} + \text{Necessary Labor Time}}{\text{Surplus Value} + \text{Variable Capital}} = \frac{\text{Total Labor Time}}{\text{Total Labor Time}}$$

Based on the 1997 US economic census, then, we find that the necessary labor time for manufacturing is 4,480,725.72 (\*1000 hours). Dividing this figure by the number of workers engaged in manufacture gives us the total hours of necessary labor per worker: 371 hours per year, or 7.15 hours per week.<sup>[7]</sup> Compared to the actual average labor time of 38.55 hours per week, this represents a decrease in labor-time of over 81%.<sup>[8]</sup>

This is, of course, only a calculation based upon the actual number of workers already presently engaged in manufacturing. It is important to delve deeper into the question of necessary labor time, and examine the ratios between essential and superfluous labor. Essential labor is that which is engaged in socially necessary functions: producing or distributing goods, maintaining or constructing public works (such as roads or sewer systems), etc. Superfluous labor is that which does not produce anything: management positions, the service industry, sales, retail, and many professional occupations fall into this category. Since one of the goals of a communist revolution should be the elimination, to as great a degree as is possible, of the superfluous labor, it is worthwhile to consider what effect this would have upon the overall socially necessary labor time.

Turning to the 2000 US general census,



look like. More importantly, however, his wariness probably also represented a sincere lack of concern over how the specifics of communist society would function. As a materialist, Marx often repeated his belief that the material base of society - that is, its mode of production - is what defines and gives rise to a given epoch's "superstructure" - that is, its laws, decision making apparatus, mode of distribution, etc.<sup>[3]</sup> It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Marx apparently considered such speculation to be extraneous to his writings. Hence, he claimed that "Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be

"society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow,"<sup>[5]</sup> and further, that individuals would be free to engage in various productive activities, thereby furthering their own development, without ever being forced to monotonously perform, either exclusively or primarily, one productive function for all eternity. This is not to suggest that specialization would not be necessary in a communist society, only that specialization would be based on individual *choice* according to individual desires, and that all fields of study would be open to everyone.



we see that the percentage of workers engaged in what can be considered essential industries is currently only 24.7%, while those engaged in more or less superfluous industries account for 75.3% of the workforce.[9]

This represents an enormous source of wasted labor, which could largely be eliminated in a communist society. Assuming an average necessary labor time of 7.15 hours per worker per week for all branches of essential industry, we can calculate the total necessary labor time. The total necessary labor time per person is thus equal to 1.7 hours per week,[10] once we have adjusted for the inclusion of workers who are unemployed and those who are engaged in superfluous labor. Clearly, the technological innovation and development has reduced the overall socially necessary labor time to a bare minimum. It is therefore reasonable to assert that the capitalist division of labor can indeed be superseded in a communist society.

## CONCLUSION

One of the early and most consistent criticisms of Marx from the anarchist-communist milieu has been the accusation of "determinism," essentially a charge that Marx wrongly believed in "iron laws of history" which slowly wrought social change as a result of economic developments. The most important specific aspect of determinism with which Marx has been charged is the notion that capitalism will inevitably give way to communism, regardless of the actions of any group of people, simply through capitalism's progression along its own lines of logic. Regardless of the validity of the specifics of these criticisms, there is certainly a tendency in Marx that seeks to deny the importance of self-activity among the working-class in resisting capitalism and eventually fomenting a revolution. As we have just seen demonstrated above, technological development advanced under capitalism has already reduced the socially necessary labor time to the barest of minimums, yet capitalism has yet to collapse. This alone goes some distance in discrediting determinist notions of historical processes.

Without the comfort of a religious faith in the inevitable implosion of capitalism, birthing a libertarian communism in the process, we are left with a host of strategic questions regarding the very nature of capitalism and the best path towards its destruction. The capacity of the capitalist

order for adaptation has long been witnessed in its unfortunate resilience, and we in turn must constantly try to gain a more complete understanding not only of capitalism as a whole, but also the *changing* specifics of capitalist production, which is simultaneously an understanding of the nature of the struggle between the proletarian class and the capitalist class. Such an understanding should inform our activity as *members of the proletariat* to focus our interventions in the class struggle in a more effective manner. Ultimately, however, I think that active participation in the class struggle is more important than formulating precise theories on the current nature of capitalism. Theoretical understanding is at its best, and most useful, when it simultaneously informs, and is informed by, our activity in actual struggle.

## Footnotes:

[1] This is an aspect of the "Labor Theory of Value" which we will not discuss here for lack of space.

[2] The nuances of socially necessary labor time will not be discussed here. For our purposes it is enough to understand a general conception of "total socially necessary labor time" as the sum total of the necessary labor time for every member of society.

[3] See German ideology, section on communism and history AND critique of the Gotha Program.

[4] *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, David

McLellan, *The German Ideology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 187

[5] *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, David McLellan, *The German Ideology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 185

[6] See Appendix A

[7] See Appendix A

[8] See Appendix B.

[9] The divide between essential and superfluous industries is not a precise measure, but an approximation based on easily available data from the 2000 census. Some essential industries, doctors for instance, are included with management, scientific research, and professionals in the census data. Further, the census data does not specify what percentage of workers in any given industry represent production workers or management. We assume here, therefore, that all calculations are merely estimates, though their accuracy should be considered fairly high.

[10] See Appendix B

Geoff is a pissed off projectionist affiliated with the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) Local 182, and a member of Class Against Class (NEFAC-Boston).

### Appendix A (1997 U.S. Economic Census: Manufacturing):

Production Workers	Production Hours (x1,000 hrs)	Wages (x \$1000)	Value Added by Manufacture (x \$1000)
12,065,257	24,183,271	338,267,197	1,825,688,027

Surplus value = Value added - variable capital (i.e. wages)

Surplus value = 1,487,420,830 (x \$1000)

Actual hours/worker: 24,183,271,000 / 12,065,257 = 2004.37 hours/year = 38.55 hours/week

### Appendix B (2000 U.S. General Census: Economic Characteristics)

Employment Status	Number	Percent
Population 16 years and over	217,168,077	100.0
Civilian Labor Force	137,668,798	63.4
Unemployed	7,947,286	5.8
<b>Occupation</b>		
Management, professional, and related	43,646,731	33.6
Service Occupations	19,276,947	14.9
Sales and office operations	34,621,390	26.7
Farming, fishing, and forestry	951,810	0.7
Construction, extraction, and maintenance	12,256,138	9.4
Production, transportation, and material moving	18,968,496	14.6

Superfluous industries:

- Management, professional, and related
- Service occupations
- Sales and office operations

Total Productive Workers: 32,176,444

% Productive Workers: 24.7%



# Anarchy In The UK: The Angry Brigade

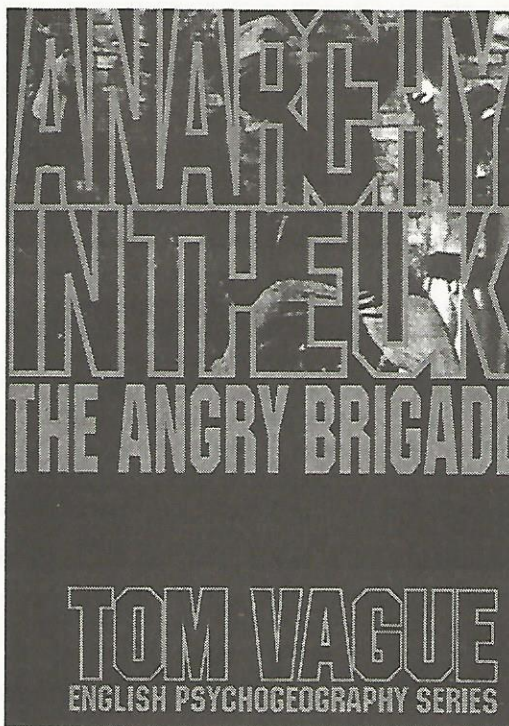
by Tom Vague (AK Press, 1997); 162 pp. \$14.95

It's a grisly business being given a book about your own past: there's this vaguely iconic photo of one's younger self and the feeling that you're trapped in a sheaf of yellowing news clippings or, as in this book, some imagined golden age of the years which directly followed 1968, an age of enviable commitment, mass struggles and unlimited horizons. Personally I've found it painful thinking about this past, doing it for the first time in a very long time. I don't regret what I did, as I said to the only person who ever asked me, a screw soon after my conviction, but the 'me' of then seems very distant and, though I respect what I did, I have felt critical and not wholly sympathetic. Some of the rhetoric and righteousness of the Angry Brigade communiqués now makes me cringe. Unfortunately it's exactly the most over-the-top rhetoric this book is keen on. Other things I was involved in writing, like the 'Daily Grind' supplement of 'International Times' or 'Strike' newspaper, stand up much better.

In 1971-2 I was convicted in the Angry Brigade trial and spent seven years in jail. In my case, the police framed a guilty man. This book by Tom Vague did not bring back that past but made me think about it. If your own past life is going to be given an airing, far better a Tom Clear than a Tom Vague. And the book is vague: a lazy cut-and-paste job (and that mostly of a cut-and-paste book of 20 odd years ago), and evasive in its own voice with nothing to say other than to make a vague connection to the Sex Pistols just so as no one misses the point of the book, the presentation of icons of cultural rebellion of the English sort.

The laziness means that, for example, there are no interviews with anyone involved in the Stoke Newington 9 Defense Committee which, not uncommonly, was more interesting than the Angry Brigade itself, a widely-based, politically creative organization of very different people. There is no sense of how people broadly support-

ing a libertarian communist view of the world felt, behaved and organized at that time, or of what was happening in the world. These things are evidently not what is now grotesquely called 'sexy'. Ideology by default is not so unusual, in this book the Angry Brigade is allowed to stand in splendid romanticized isolation.



The Angry Brigade's attacks on property targets mostly occurred in the time span of Mr. Edward Heath's government, though attacks continued all over the country well into the seventies, something which showed that the Angry Brigade was not a tight-knit clandestine organization. Until the recent election when the Conservative Party became almost immediately of no interest to anyone, Mr. Heath was presented as a genial, troublesome old boy representing opposition to hard-line free-market capitalism, a portrayal which made me feel old and the actions of the Angry Brigade somewhat farcical. At the time however, Mr Heath was not like this, his Selsdon Man policy was hardline free-market capitalism.

At the time this was shocking. It failed partly because of the especially strong and unlawful opposition of the organized working class and also because the decisive use made by capital globally of the oil price shock of 1973 had not yet shifted the balance of forces in favor of capital. By the time Mrs. Thatcher came to power it was a fait accompli. The Selsdon Man policy was also accompanied by a brutalization of state power. Looked at now, the fact that there were only one or two deaths in police custody, or that the first police computer was put to use, must make it seem like a truly innocent time, but that is not how it felt. These were shocking things. David Oluwale's death in police custody was especially shocking.

I can only say that my own experience was one of ambivalent innocence. On the one hand as a member of the Claimants Union I had experienced concerted self-organization winning tangible victories, but also as a scruffy resident of Notting Hill an increased level of police repression which we also organized against in the battle to turn private squares into communal playgrounds. A feeling that victories could and should be gained and another, less conscious, that the state and capital had had a gutful of our victories and were going to come down hard.

They were then the early days of a cusp, heady days of working class self-confidence but it was becoming clear that international capital and its guarantor nation states had had enough of it. This was not analyzed or theorized until around 1973-4 and then not from the Bolshevik left but from the Italian autonomist movement; from Toni Negri, Sergio Bologna and Ferruccio Gambino. They were also the years when de-skilling computerization was first applied to production. We were all very young at the time (I had just turned 23 when I was arrested) and cannot pretend we understood all of this. We shared the class confidence of the time but had a gut feeling that this was being challenged, by the Ford Motor Company for example, and by the British state most of all.



We were arrested in August 1971. In this month, two years ahead of the oil price shock, President Nixon made a key move in favour of global capital by ending the relationship between gold and the dollar, creating the conditions for floating exchange rates. In the same month the British state interned many Republicans in the Six Counties. The Angry Brigade's last action before our arrest was to bomb an army hall in London in response.

The importance of internment, something more immediately repressive than seemingly technical moves in the world of international money, and a lot closer to home, is lost in the Tom Vague book. Internment, the arrest and imprisonment of hundreds of people not because they had committed anything designated as a crime but because their families or history of open political resistance made it appear legitimate to lock them up to the government of Edward Heath, is surely something that would be even more shocking were it to happen now. It was certainly shocking then but perversely welcome from a theoretical viewpoint. The modern British state played by the rules until it suited them to unilaterally suspend them. It's what we'd known all along. A year later thirteen citizens of Derry on a peaceful demonstration were shot dead by the armed agencies of the British state. I was in prison then and it felt like the British state wanted the IRA, they wanted a militarisation of the struggle in Ireland as preferable to Free Derry and democratic communism in practice.

These dates, ignored by Tom Vague, had real consequences. Those of us convicted were weighed off in December 1972. By the next year a serious IRA bombing campaign had begun in England. I was in the Scrubs when the Old Bailey bomb went off, the whole jail celebrated and I was relieved I'd already got my sentence. Bombing had gotten a lot heavier and we'd have gotten heavier sentences.

Romanticization requires a timeless context, as if undertaking a rebellious act is heroic whatever the circumstances. I respect my past because the anger and commitment felt were real enough but it was not heroic. I was very young, hadn't experienced serious repression, and the Angry Brigade actions were all before the IRA made bombing a serious business.

As it happened we were due for fifteen years. Jake Prescott had copped this in an earlier trial with less against him; the screw in charge of our escort to the Bailey had money on it; and our judge said that is what

he would have given were it not for the jury's plea for clemency. I was much better at defending myself at the Old Bailey than as an urban guerrilla. In snide mode I'd say, par for the course for an ex-Cambridge student. True but it was also more suited politically. Hilary Creek, Anna Mendleson and I defended ourselves (which I would strongly recommend at least one person doing at any joint trial) and were able to speak

*"The many and various people who did Angry Brigade things were not very comfortable with clandestinity, which is inevitably elitist when it doesn't come out of a mass movement. Looked at now this conclusion seems inescapable. The looseness of clandestine organization doesn't help either. One of the most important texts of the time was 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness' which showed how informal leaderships were especially undemocratic and it remains especially relevant now when ideologues of the Internet distort its democratic potential with their holistic flimflam."*

directly to twelve other citizens without mediation, except for the judge interrupting and lying when it really mattered, which he did because in my case the police really had framed a guilty man and there were holes in the frame. Looking back on it now I think, poor fuckers, a captive audience for six long months. Equally, first sign of them abolishing the jury system and I'm off, out the country. One of the great moments of the recent past was the Liverpool jury acquitting the women who seriously damaged a warplane destined for Indonesia and its vicious colonialism. The jury system is something exceptional in the representative democracies of present day capitalism, the only time when ordinary people have real power.

This book deals at some length with the trial but once again without context. It is not so extraordinary to see the trial as one of the few achievements of the Angry Brigade, and achieved precisely because the Angry Brigade was no longer clandestine. For libertarian communists wanting the mass democracy of a knowledgeable, critically intelligent citizenry, secrecy is a contradiction in terms, exactly that Bolshevik-Bakuninist bullshit we detested in everyday life. The courtroom was made into an open forum by defendants defending themselves and the jury did me a massive favor, ten years instead of the allotted

fifteen. It was before the first IRA bombs in London, true, but the jury saved me five years bang-up. After he'd given the verdicts and acquitted half of us, the nervous foreman stood up and said clearly that the jury asked for clemency on our behalf. Some fucking moment. It felt like a vindication of the politics, the critically intelligent citizenry in action even if I was sick to be going down at all.

If the trial was a vindication of sorts, what then of my record as an urban guerrilla?

It's a difficult question, some attacks were well carried out and, as with the attacks on Italian state property in response to the police murder of the anarchist comrade Pinelli, appropriate. On the other hand it didn't last very long, a little under two years, and this when everything was in our favor: security in this pre-IRA era was very weak compared to what goes down these days; and since most of us did not belong to any of the many known leftist parties and groupuscules of the time, we had a head start when it came to political police files. My (our) not lasting very long points to a terrible lack of experience. But since writing this review at all is painful enough it's worth trying to be scrupulous in de-constructing this lack of experience. I lived in relatively innocent times, had not experienced repression beyond a police cosh and arrest at a Vietnam demonstration, and had never been in prison. This, unheroically, encouraged the belief that I would be very unlucky to be caught. Some Angry Brigade actions, recorded and unrecorded, required a degree of planning and nerve, but I contributed massively to my own bad luck.

The many and various people who did Angry Brigade things were not very comfortable with clandestinity, which is inevitably elitist when it doesn't come out of



a mass movement. Looked at now this conclusion seems inescapable. The looseness of clandestine organization doesn't help either. One of the most important texts of the time was *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* which showed how informal leaderships were especially undemocratic and it remains especially relevant now when ideologues of the Internet distort its democratic potential with their holistic flim-flam. There was at least not that naïveté-from-ego which demands you tell the whole world what you're doing. For one thing we were libertarian communists believing in the mass movement and, for another, we were NOT THAT SERIOUS. Put baldly like this it sounds especially arrogant, Yeah man, we never took it seriously anyway: what I mean is that like many young people then and now we smoked a lot of dope and spent a lot of time having a good time. We had none of the vanguardist assumptions of the Red Army Faction in Germany (heroic though they were) or the Red Brigades in Italy (infiltrated and manipulated as they were). To be serious about your beliefs and wanting a good time in the process may have been part of those innocent times but is not some eternal psychological impossibility, a contradiction written in stone. The respect element of the critical respect I feel now is that we were serious about what we felt and thought and acted on it. Doing it and having a good time was largely financed by check fraud. This too left trails but neither these, nor our untrained clandestinity, led directly to the shortness of my career as an urban guerrilla.

Early in 1971 one of the advantages we had, of not being known to the police, had gone. And yet we continued. The middle-aged man I now am can wave the finger at this, it was fucking madness. We continued out of stubbornness, the Angry Brigade having a dynamic of its own, and most of all from a naive, romantic sense of loyalty. Two comrades who had been arrested should not be deserted, left on their own, even though our addresses or names had been in a captured daft address book. Continuing in these circumstances was not being serious taken to a new level, it was foolhardy: the youthful feeling that nothing very terrible could happen to us and fuck them, we'll show them.

The lack of any sense of historical context in this book and the romanticism that makes for, is not limited to the balance of class forces nationally and internationally. There is also no sense of the general or political culture of the time. It was a great

time in as much as what had been bohemian broke out of that enclave; there was energy, enthusiasm, not much money and a creative belief that anything was possible. On the other hand a large number of songs of the time were still those of male self-pity, and 'the left' still spoke as a taken-for-granted WE, we the unitary oppressed. In the period of class self-confidence leftist parties and groupuscules had a constituency and not exclusively in universities. Some had places in trade union committees, some were complete nutters capable of two hour windy speeches with a front row of uptight acolytes ready to snarl at anyone who might yawn or laugh. What they had in common, like the Christian Bolsheviks of our present government, was an absolute self-confidence in speaking for a unitary WE.

The Angry Brigade communiqués were right in their criticism of the authoritarian left but they too tended to adopt the 'We voice'. Read now there is a comfortably sectarian ring to them, as if 'the left' was the only problem, a small world one could have an impact on. In part 'the left' was the problem but the real questioning of it came from women and black people, rightly sceptical of the Left's 'We'. It is hard to imagine now how sexist the left was. One Anarchist conference sticks in the mind, it was appalling, big guys with beards downing pints and being genially intolerant or uncomprehending of the aspirations of "the chicks". Hard for us to imagine then the idea of autonomous black organization and struggle, which had to be fought for in the years to come.

The critically distant me of today also sees how much political activity of the time was gestural. For myself, becoming an Angry Brigade activist as well as being active in open struggles that affected me, was, ironically, prompted by disgust at the gestural nature of more conventional leftist politics. This disgust took off at a planning meeting for a Vietnam Solidarity Campaign demonstration at the Toynbee Hall, Whitechapel by which time I'd already been arrested twice on such demos and got a beating on one.

The American war against Vietnam is barely mentioned in Tom Vague's book but the movement against it was on a huge scale and it was international. There was debate in the libertarian left, 'why support the authoritarian communists of Hanoi', but correctly I think, most comrades said that if the Americans were to win there was no possibility of any progressive movement

there and that it would be massively discouraging to liberation struggles across the 'Third World'. It was a time when we did at least try to think internationally and I do still respect our attacks on Spanish and Italian targets in solidarity with imprisoned and murdered comrades in these countries.

Anyway some of us turned up to the afore-mentioned Vietnam planning meeting. Tariq Ali was in the chair, and among those present were four guys who were quite obviously cops. We said it was ridiculous to go on with them there, but no no, said the chair, we must continue, we could not confront these four, let alone throw them out. We continued to make our point and, in fact, the four cops plus one we hadn't even noticed got up and left themselves. It made us feel that demonstrations were simply routine and that all that would happen was that people at the front would get whacked and arrested in the Grosvenor Square set-piece, with the leadership safely in the rear.

But why then bombing, a 19th century tactic, easily labelled as anarchist (which we were not), necessarily clandestine and, given that we did not want to hurt anyone, necessarily limited in the damage it could do. Isn't that essentially gestural? At the time it didn't seem so. Having been beaten on gestural Grosvenor Square demonstrations, it felt like it was hurting them without hurting ourselves. It also came from frustration and anger that here were these guys in government and corporations making decisions that had a seriously bad impact on the lives of thousands of people with impunity, and nothing bad was going to happen to them personally, what they did a mealy-mouthed necessity. It also came from the feeling that we were at a cusp in terms of the balance of class power, and that there was a need for action not constrained by capitalist defined legality. Within a year the mass movement won two major victories by disregarding legality at Saltley and at Pentonville prison. It would be tempting to think there was some connection but that too would be romantic. All that connects them is that they occurred in the same period. Within another two years this same mass movement was being terrorized by its own leadership with much publicized talk of possible right wing coups. At Windsor a free rock festival was systematically smashed up by the cops.

I had been involved in other gestures and about these I feel less ambiguous, more certain that they were right. There was, for example, the auction of houses



owned by Kensington and Chelsea Council to the private sector at which we put on suits and bid up the houses to fantastic levels till some dealer, sweating on a bargain tumbled something was up and the thing collapsed in chaos. This went back to some of the tactics of the Unemployed Workers Movement in the 1930s and looked forward to tactics of today's Greens.

Or there was ripping up the Finals papers at Cambridge, a liberating experience I have never regretted. Again the times were softer, there would always be jobs, it had little or no impact in future years. It was a gesture but one that could harm no one and which did go to the heart of our libertarian communist beliefs, that elitism is the twin of exploitation, the one that mocks the rhetoric of opportunities for everyone.

Kensington and Chelsea sold their houses. Elitism continues to mock the rhetoric of democracy. The seizing of Powis Square, knocking down the railings of this private residential square and turning into a communal playground, this is the only victory that has survived. All that happened with the Angry Brigade was that it cheered up the relatively powerless for a while. But it was too much from the outside. For example, we had no idea how attacks on the Ford Motor Company would impact on workers in dispute there. Many innocent comrades had their houses turned upside down by the cops. All I can say is that at least we were never like those unscrupulous leftist groups that encouraged black youth to attack police stations after the death of Colin Roache and then disowned them when they did it with petrol bombs (which are far more democratic than dynamite).

The Angry Brigade was also ironically spectacular, given that I and others were much influenced by 'The Society of the Spectacle'. Our actions depended on publicity and have become in this book part of a seamless spectacle, safely situated in a romanticised past. If there was a rationale we could take from situationist analysis it would be precisely the seamlessness of the spectacle, that no one is ever personally responsible for exploitation or repression. 'The Society of the Spectacle' still stands up as a fine description of modern capitalism but it was never prescriptive. Though it is tempting to mock - at least there has never been an Angry Brigade exhibition at the George Pompidou Centre. I say this because it is the situationist element in the Angry Brigade rhetoric which often makes me cringe, and which Tom Vague seizes on in this volume in his psychogeographic series. It is easy to

see now that theoretically spot on though it was, Guy Debord's analysis came from a group of Bolshevik bohemians and there is an elitist tone to it. What stands out in the Tom Vague book is how comfortable he is with what we could call 'the situationist angle' while saying nothing about the analysis and theory that came out of the Italian movement, from Potere Operaio onward, which was more important to us.

Perhaps this is not surprising given that



the Italian theory was written as hard strategic and tactical analysis from a working class viewpoint, whereas the bohemianism of the SI has made it perfect for that massive displacement of intellectual activity that has occurred since the class defeat of the mid seventies. There is always displacement and morbid symptoms in periods of class defeat. It's not that the terrain of 'culture' is not a weightier area in economic life but the shift of oppositional analysis almost exclusively to it and the bullshit romanticism of Guattari and Deluze, for example, shows only a colossal loss of nerve.

The aim of Tom Vague's book has surely been to romanticize specifically our sense of commitment in an age he obviously believes is dominated by that sassy irony which makes an unambiguous opposition to capitalism slightly ridiculous. In doing this he leaves me trapped in the past where I do not want to be and do not feel myself to be. It also underestimates the present. Irony is not all pervasive, and fightbacks are not gestural, life is too tough for that. The ability of so many young people having a tough time to survive and be creative is stronger than 25-30 years ago and is shown, for example, in how they have got around the seemingly draconian powers of the Criminal Justice Act; by the organization of the Hackney

Homeless Festival and the achievements of the Exodus Collective; by the everyday resistance and resilience of black people in face of repression from one of the bastions of racism, the police force. These days all campaigns of the oppressed which might once have been called reformist are close to the knuckle, 'bread and butter' strikes almost automatically a challenge to the ruling fetish of managerial authority.

What has survived and flourished from the libertarian movement and especially from the women's movement has been a scepticism about that automatic 'we' of traditional left politics. On the other hand in defeat the notion of autonomy (now used in mobile phone adverts) has become enmeshed in notions of personal identity. It is not just the notion of commitment but of unity that seems to be of the past. Unity today needs to be worked for. But it can be stronger than that of the automatic 'we' when borne of mutual respect and if it includes those made furiously angry by our government of Christian Bolsheviks as their rhetoric of inclusion becomes ever

more excluding. If my 'generation' of those who believe capitalism is neither inevitable nor eternal have anything to offer I hope it will be a degree of hard-earned experience that we never had in the past and anger at what demands anger. It is this which I respect about my past, the anger at the twin evils of exploitation and elitism and the huge weight of cultural flim-flam that supports it. I hope it is that which has survived, that rather than endless hours of lame satire, weird ideologies or a fetishization of the Angry Brigade.

- reviewed by John Barker  
(ex-Angry Brigade)

For an Angry Brigade chronology and communiques see:

<http://recollection-books.com/sim/library/AngryBrigade>

This book review was originally printed in *Transgressions: A Journal of Urban Exploration*



# A NEW WORLD IN OUR HEARTS:

## Eight Years of Writings from the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation

*Edited by Roy San Filippo (AK Press, 2003); 139pp. \$11.95*

The Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation lasted from 1989 to 1998. It was a long-lasting and serious effort to form a North American revolutionary anarchist federation. It would certainly be very useful to have a selection of the wide range of writings produced by the Federation, from its newspaper (also called Love & Rage) and its internal bulletins, together with a solid and informative introduction. This is not that book. Instead, it is a short volume with a highly personal selection of written work, reflecting the current politics of the editor.

The editor does not choose to select writings on many aspects of the period in which Love and Rage existed. Anti-patriarchal struggles, for example. Struggles of African-Americans. Our Mexican section. Our support for Eastern European resisters. Anti-war issues (particularly the 1991 Gulf War). Prisoners. The living wage campaign. Labor struggles. None of these activities make it. Nor does it include Ron Tabor's serial critique of Marxist theory.

Rather than discussing any of this, the introduction by Roy San Filippo rapidly goes into the final collapse of Love and Rage (2/3 of the introduction). This took the form of an internal conflict mostly between two caucuses (factions) -- the background being the general decline of the left in this period. San Filippo puts all the blame on one of the factions -- the one which I supported at the time. Very briefly, one faction was abandoning anarchism in favor of a Maoist version of Marxism-Leninism. The other faction fought to maintain a belief in anarchism, while aware that further theory and practice were necessary. The introduction does not discuss the Marxist-Leninists, but instead heatedly denounces the anarchist faction for our "purism and sectarianism" as well as "arrogance" in being "dogmatic" because we continued to support revolutionary anarchism. Following the introduction there are twenty articles, two by supporters of the pro-anarchist faction (one by me) and eleven by our opponents, showing the lopsided nature of the editing.

This little book has four sections. The first, ANARCHY, is a loose collection of pieces. It includes a brief critique of Weatherman politics and two pages on the black bloc. There is a 'Draft Proposal on the State', which has worn well, I think. Dealing with the possible needs for coordination of a revolutionary army during a civil war, it said, "The anarchist ideal is democratic popular militias...We advocate only as much centralization and discipline as is temporarily necessary to win the revolution...with as much internal democracy as possible." (p. 15)

There is an article by Chris Day, 'Dual Power in the Selva Lacandon'. Day was to become the key initiator of the anti-anarchist faction. The piece is formally within the framework of anarchism and it says some interesting things about the Zapatistas. In hindsight there are several striking things about the article. One is that it raises weaknesses of anarchism without proposing any alternatives. For example, it calls the idea of a popular militia defeating a counterrevolutionary army "naïve". It doubts that the Zapatistas would be able "to create a stateless, classless society" even if they won, but gives them uncritical support anyway because "they may be able to take things a few steps closer". (pp.30-31)

The worst is a cynical paragraph saying, "there are the supposed structures of dual power that are under the domination of an aspiring elite...These...may actually constitute a dramatic step forward..." "The people may really gain," Day claims, "from such a new set of bosses." (pp.18-19)

There is a philosophical discussion by Matt Black, which was to lead to his rejection of anarchism. Unfortunately none of the responses to his statement are included. There is Chris Day's 'The Revolutionary Anarchist Tradition'. This piece, as it stands, reads like a pro-organizational perspective on anarchist history, virtually a Platformist statement. It covers Malatesta, the Platform, the FAI, and the Friends of Durrutti. What is not obvious is that this is a watered-down and cleaned-up version of his original document, 'The Historical

Failures of Anarchism'. That document went considerably beyond this version in its rejection of anarchism. It claimed that only a centralized, authoritarian army could win a revolution. Without reprinting this paper it is hard for readers to figure out what the shouting was all about. Instead of reprinting any of the responses to Day's original document, the book includes a piece by me responding to a part of his paper on why the Spanish revolution was defeated.

The second section is labeled ORGANIZATION. It begins with 'Love and Rage in the New World Order', an article by Chris Day (altogether the editor chose eight articles by Chris Day, in whole or part, out of the twenty). This was his famous "reprole" document, claiming that the key constituency for L&R should not be the working class or other oppressed. Instead it should be young adults from the middle class whom the bad economy was forcing down into the working class from which their parents had once escaped (re-proletarianization). This thesis sank like a stone. But what was almost unnoticed at the time (1994) was Day's overt rejection of anarchism, "Calling ourselves anarchists identifies us not as anti-authoritarians but as ideological dinosaurs...The weight of anarchist history is...a set of concrete boots dragging us to our deaths in the muck at the bottom of a stagnant lake." (p.63) Instead he praises the European autonomists, who were neo-Marxists.

This is followed by a former Love & Rage editorial, 'What Kind of Revolutionary Organization is Useful Today?' It rejects both the vanguard party and the temporary autonomous zone in favor of revolutionary pluralism. That meant to unite a range of legitimate mass struggles in a democratic and popular fashion, in which the anarchist organization would fight to make the movement as participatory, open, and militant as possible. I think this much remains valid. Unfortunately this was counter posed to a working class perspective, even to seeing the working class as at least one of the key forces for liberation. Instead the three main struggles were listed as against white supremacy, support for the Zapatistas, and



opposition to prisons and the criminal justice system. The concept of a prefigurative organizational perspective is raised in a piece by Matt Black followed by an account of the limitations of an infoshop.

The third section is on RACE. It is not about the struggles of African-Americans but about how white people should deal with their racism. Most of this (three out of four pieces) is from the viewpoint of the 'Race Traitor' journal, started by Noel Ignatiev (These views are now supported by the Bring the Ruckus organization in the U.S., of which the editor is a supporter.). The exception is an L&R editorial, 'Building

a Multi-Racial/Multi-National Revolutionary Anarchist Organization'. At the time, the editorial was something of a compromise and no grouping in Love and Rage was really happy with it -- although I continue to agree with the goal of the title, while the Race Traitor/BTR people are against it.

San Fillipo begins the dispute on this topic in his editorial, criticizing a statement by the pro-anarchist faction that is actually reprinted in the last section. He criticizes the statement because "systematic white privilege was dismissed in [their] document as 'petty and apparent' privileges of white workers over workers of color" (p.2). What we actually said in 'What We Believe' was, "We call on white workers to give up their apparent, petty privileges over people of color, privileges which tie them to the ruling class. This is not so the whites will be worse off but guilt-free, but so that they will be both materially and morally better off" (p.99).

This means that racism is bad for the whole working class, including the white majority. Because of racism, the workers have few, weak, unions and limited social welfare benefits, certainly as compared to the Western European or even Canadian workers -- even in spite of the famous U.S. high standard of living. Therefore, it would be in the interest of the white workers to fight against racism. Anarchists can appeal to them, not only on moral grounds but also on grounds of material self-interest. Compared to what the workers could get from the capitalists --even under capitalism

-- the benefits the white workers get from racism are only apparent (the psychological wages of whiteness, as it has been called) and/or petty (real but relatively small in comparison). This is a class orientation that does not subordinate the interests of Black workers to whites.

In the RACE section the main pieces argue that white workers get major benefits from racial privileges, benefits which must be destroyed before the working class can unite against capitalism (as opposed to advocating class unity against white racism). This makes it hard to appeal to white workers, I should think, since people

do not like to give up benefits for themselves and their families. It would also be hard to appeal to Black workers, since, they said, it would be racist for a mostly-white revolutionary organization to offer ideas to Black people (meanwhile white and Black politicians and church people do not stop saying whatever they want to the Black community). This leads very little

for radicals to say to anyone. Of the ending of racist and imperialist privileges, Day, Jessica, and Olson declared of their program, "This will mean a quantitative reduction in the standard of living for many workers in the imperialist countries in general and for white workers in the U.S. in particular. Winning privileged workers to this necessity is a daunting but no less crucial aspect of revolutionary work in the U.S." (p.90). Daunting indeed!

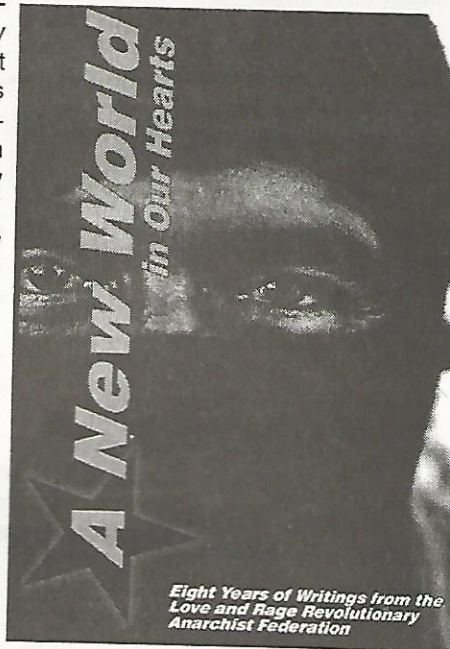
Similarly, Noel Ignatiev (founder of the Race Traitor concept), wrote, "The abolitionists [i.e. advocates of the Race Traitor political line] consider it a useless project to try to win the majority of whites, or even of working class whites to anti-racism." (p.79). Instead, he proposed to organize a minority of radical whites to give up their privileges and thereby force the system to attack the rest of the white workers, pushing them in a revolutionary direction. We need "only enough counterfeit whites --

race traitors -- to undermine the confidence of the police, etc., in their ability to differentiate between their friends and enemies by color...The coming together of a minority determined to break the laws of whiteness so flagrantly..." (p.80).

It is not entirely clear what this means, but apparently these race traitor whites would get into fights with the police so often that the police would tend to beat up whites as frequently as they beat African-Americans. This would, he thinks, radicalize the general white working population. But what if the cops could distinguish between the minority of radicals and the rest of the white population? Or what if the other whites could see that it was a minority of white radicals who were provoking the police, and blame the radicals, not the cops? (He does note that some would turn to fascism.) Frankly, it is one thing to reject racism but another thing to propose an elitist trick to force white workers into racial justice. We need a program which really can win the majority of white workers to anti-racism, because it is good for them as well as being good. A united, non-discriminating working class can win more from the capitalist class even now than the whites can gain from racist privileges. (In an appendix, some women objected to the sexist implications of Ignatiev's claim that the state protected white women.)

There is nothing wrong with reprinting these pieces, since they were a major current in the Love and Rage Federation. It is wrong to let them go almost unchallenged by any of the other viewpoints in the Federation. This could have laid the basis for further discussions in the movement. But this is not done. In this as in other ways, the book is an attempt to use the reputation of Love and Rage to support the views of a present-day political current.

The last section is labeled LOVE AND RAGE. It covers the final faction fight and the end of the organization, just a few years before the explosion of anarchism after the Battle for Seattle. It is as biased as the rest of the book. Of five documents, one is the founding statement of the pro-anarchist grouping, 'What We Believe'. There are three statements by the anti-anarchist grouping and one by a Race Traitor supporter who supports the anti-anarchist grouping. The major documents of the anarchist tendency are not included--just as the major documents of the anti-anarchists are not. It is not mentioned that, after





Love and Rage, the anti-anarchists went on to openly embrace Marxism-Leninism, many joining the Freedom Road Socialist Organization.

'What We Believe' said, "Anarchism [is] central to our politics. There are historical failings of anarchism, but they can be dealt with from within anarchism. Anarchist mistakes occur within a basically liberating vision [unlike Marxism]. ... We must learn from other traditions of struggle, such as Black nationalism or feminism or ecology, but what we learn must be integrated into revolutionary anarchism." (p.97) This is what the editor denounces as "...a step toward a dogmatic and purist brand of politics..." (p.3) What

he seems to object to is the commitment to anarchism in the first place.

The difference between anarchism and Marxism-Leninism -- despite overlaps in some areas -- is fundamental in their goals. Anarchism seeks to replace a society of bosses and workers, of oppressors and oppressed, with a self-managed society run by the direct, decentralized, democracy of its working people. Marxism-Leninism, whatever its insights, aims at a society run by a revolutionary minority, a centralized party, managing a centralized state and a centralized economy. The difference between these goals has nothing to do with either side being more dogmatic than the other.

I am not going to argue the case for pro-organizational, working class, revolutionary-socialist anarchism here. It was one current in Love and Rage's politics, even if not the one that came to predominate. Someday a more balanced book, reflecting the range of political currents in Love and Rage, will be published. I look forward to it.

- reviewed by Wayne Price,  
Open City Collective (NEFAC-NYC)

# Anarchism vs. Primitivism

by Brian Oliver Sheppard (See Sharp Press, 2003); 44pp. \$3.50

Over the course of the last decade or so, a significant debate has occurred within anarchist circles. The philosophy of primitivism has entered the anarchist milieu. This philosophical perspective is based on the concept that the critical system of domination in modern societies is the very fact of civilization itself.

A related primitivist argument is centered around the advent of technology. Primitivists view the development of technology as the cornerstone to the development of civilization; and therefore, the hierarchies that have come with modern society. This unique understanding of systems of domination has been extremely controversial in anarchist circles and has become the subject of much debate within the movement (including this publication). The rather lengthy pamphlet, *Anarchism vs. Primitivism* details both the basic tenets of primitivist philosophy and presents much of the counter-argument to the primitivist claims regarding their philosophy, their place in the tradition of anarchism, and the possibility for primitivism to establish itself as a model of social organization.

The primitivist ideal is based on the belief that any social structure that vaguely resembles organized civilization is hierarchical and exploitative. Their ideal society

is based on a belief that human beings lived in egalitarian social relations during the hunter-gatherer stage of human social revolution.

They impart this stage in human history with many idealized images of social relations between ages, genders, and tribal groups. However, what primitivists are best at is criticizing what they believe to be the crucial flaws of civilization: language, technology, and agriculture.

Language is seen as the source of domination because it is an imperfect communication medium. The primitivist ideal is to develop a communication system that is not symbolic because symbolic communication creates inequalities. Unfortunately, the primitivists

have yet to posit a rational substitute for language and Sheppard is quick to point out the absurdity of such a claim as leading to telepathic communication. The problem of technology seems to be one of the cru-

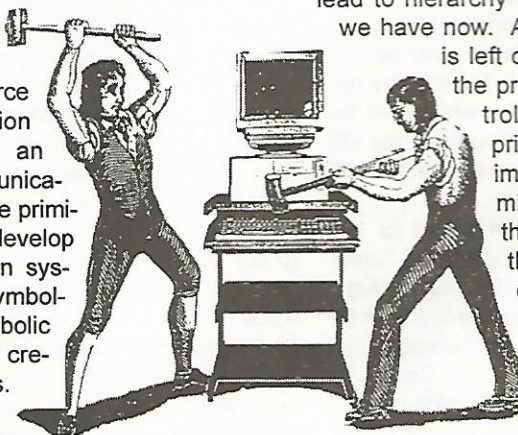
cial concerns for primitivists. They imbue technology with a certain sense of autonomy; once technology is developed, a Pandora's Box of hierarchy and destruction is opened that will doom humanity.

Technology is believed to be "a complex system involving division of labor, resource extraction, and exploitation" (p.16) which most anarchists will also recognize as the crucial elements of capitalism. Yet, the human factor is left out of the argument. We have no control over technology and it will inevitably lead to the horrors of modern civilization. Finally, the primitivists have found the source humanity's problems - agriculture! The problem of agriculture is simple; it is the doorway to civilization. The surpluses created by stationary societies that grow their own food inevitably lead to divisions of labor which lead to hierarchy which lead to the mess

we have now. Again, the human factor is left out. It is surplus that is the problem, rather than control of the surplus.

The primitivist arguments often imply a certain amount of misanthropy because of their inability to factor in the concept of human control. The classical anarchist argument has been that the problem of modern civilization is one of who makes decisions.

The primitivists ignore the issue of control all together because they appear to be afraid of the choices even a free people will make. For them, the problem is civilization in and of itself.





The primitivist solution for the problem of civilization seems to be its destruction, and a return to the hunter-gatherer society. They believe that this form of social organization will free humanity from most hierarchies, the alienation of modern labor, and the burden of modern social problems. We are led to believe that human beings in such societies did not have hierarchical relationships, that work was easy and left much time for leisure, and that the "simple" lifestyle enjoyed by "primitive" people left one with little worry. The arguments against such over-idealization of such societies are many. Some take the purely philosophical approach of viewing this conception as a return to a time that never was, while others have turned to anthropological and historical data to disprove the primitivist argument. In both cases, what we see is a clear refutation of the primitivist ideal.

Essentially, the first case rests on the idea that we cannot predict or make accurate estimations about the life led by people before civilization as there are no records of such a thing. In this case, primitivists are free to imbue humanity before civilization with whatever qualities they wish. The academic argument against primitivism follows by reporting that the "primitive" societies that have been studied by historians and anthropologists have had some degree of hierarchy. In fact, many, if not all, "primitive" societies often behaved in ways that are very contradictory to basic anarchist tenets. They have contained strict gender hierarchies, elements of militarism, competition with out-groups (that is, other groups of people), and many of the other nasty elements of civilization. Historical anthropologists have found skeletal fragments that point to the serious problems of work in "primitive" societies. Hunters run the risk of joint and muscle problems due to repetitive motions related to the use of simple weaponry (and primitivists would have us believe that repetitive stress injuries are a function of civilization?). Gathering processes necessary to adequately feed even small, band level societies require treks that can last days. Death due to hunger, disease, or even simple injury was commonplace in a society without adequate food surpluses and medical technology to cure the sick and injured. The primitivists would have us trade the social problems of civilization for the social problems of several millennia ago.

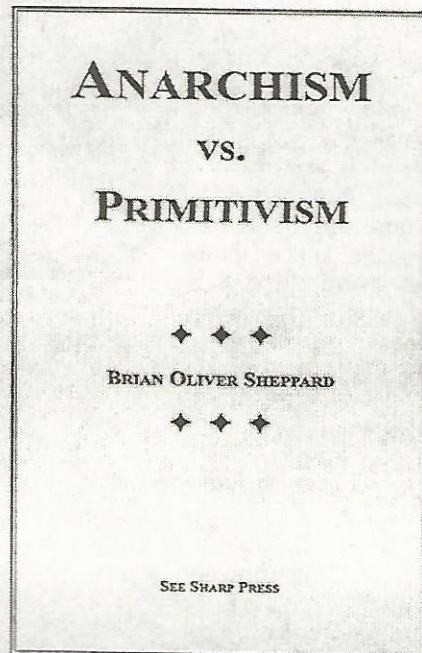
Primitivists are not content with simply arguing against modern civilization, they must also argue against anarchism itself. For them, classical anarchist philosophies rooted in issues of class struggle are themselves products of civilization. The primitivist argument against anarchism takes two basic, interrelated forms: the first is based on a recent trend of anti-organizationalism among people who would call

because they believe in the reorganization of present day society around direct control of labor by the workers themselves. The anti-organizationalists and primitivists see this as creating a society where labor is mandatory. It seems that their objection is with work itself, and not the process of work which is often alienated through capitalist social relations. They take great pains to associate classical anarchism with forms of authoritarian approaches to labor such as Marxist-Leninism and (even worse) plain old capitalism ignoring the plethora of anarchist theory on the structure of work in capitalist societies.

The problem for the primitivists is that anarchists just aren't willing to go far enough in their critique. The primitivists believe that classical anarchism is just another apologist for what they deem to be the real problem, civilization. Because classical anarchists often believe in restructuring the society around principles of direct social control and non-hierarchical social relations rather than obliterating it altogether and returning to a "primitive" existence, they are seen as reformists, liberals, or simply authoritarians (because all civilization is authoritarian in nature). The absurdity of this claim need not be addressed in this article.

*Anarchism vs. Primitivism* presents these arguments in great detail; outlining the primitivist ideology and presenting the case against it. The pamphlet is well researched and contains a plethora of academic sources for defying the rhetoric of primitivism. Its only flaw is that it is written more for the opponent of primitivism than for the primitivist. Its tone is often arrogant or sarcastic, poking fun at or mocking the major theorists of primitivism while simultaneously addressing their arguments (although, readers of the NEA will know that I am just as guilty of such writing). This tone is sure to turn most primitivists off from the content, which is incredibly solid. In this sense, the pamphlet seems to be another case of preaching to the choir of opponents to primitivism. However, if one gets past the sarcasm, it is an invaluable resource for those who wish to address the philosophical, anthropological, and historical claims made by primitivists.

- reviewed by Stas,  
Sophia Perovskaia Collective  
(NEFAC-Boston)



themselves anarchists, the second is based on the association of classical anarchism with modern civilization. The anti-organizationalist sentiment that has become pervasive among certain anarchists believes that any form of formal (even if directly democratic) organization will inevitably result in hierarchy and domination. This old argument is based on the notion that "whoever says organization, says oligarchy (rule by the few)." For the anti-organizationalists, when people begin to organize any form of social institution, this automatically gives them some form of power over others (either those who are not in the institution or minority positions within). As alluded to previously, this argument does not take into account the possibility of non-hierarchical forms of social organization nor the will of people to develop certain permanent social structures.

Classical forms of anarchism, particularly anarcho-syndicalism and anarcho-communism, are branded as "workerist"



## Greek Platformists From Down Under

Hello comrades,

I have been an anarchist-communist since 1980-81, when I left the Communist Youth of Greece (KNE), and have been living in Australia on and off for over ten years now.

I am writing to say thank you for the parcel of NEA#6 you sent me, which I received today. I am hoping to distribute copies here in Australia, and possibly translate some essays into Greek.

In other news, I have already translated for the first time in Greek the full text of *Organizational Platform of Libertarian Communists* (Makhno, Arshinov, Mett, Yelensky and Linski). Now I am doing corrections and final editing. When it is finished, I will post it up on the two Indymedia's in Greece (Athens and Thessaloniki) and other sites, and I will try and eventually publish it as a pamphlet. Until now only the first response by Malatesta has been translated in Greek.

Even here in Australia, platformism is relatively unknown and the ideas of revolutionary anarchist-communism have little influence. This is why I wanted copies of the NEA (and other platformist literature) to try and organize something.

Anyway, if you want sometime I can write an article or chronology or something like that about anarchist-communism in Australia and of course in Greece, history, current situation, etc, because I am here, but I never broke links with the Greek comrades and I have got the biggest anarchist archive in Greek language outside Greece.

Thanks again.

With anarchist-communist regards,

Dimitri

PO Box 2120, Lygon Street North,  
East Brunswick, Victoria 3057  
AUSTRALIA

## Arriba los que Luchan!!

Dear Comrades,

At last, here it is, the latest issue of our paper *Hombre y Sociedad*. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons (economical, the

difficulties of working out the revolutionary press in Chile, etc.), we haven't been able to come out since December 2001.

The situation here in Chile isn't the best right now, as we have been facing some harassment in the face of the First National Students Conference (Anarchist) and the popular protest of May 21st.

Our organization (CUAC) is also going to have another congress in order to clarify some doctrinary and tactical problems.

We hope you enjoy the paper. Feel free to send any comments or contributions. Thanks for the interview in NEA#6. It was a great issue, and quite helpful to understanding our movement on a global scale.

Arriba los que Luchan!!

Jose Antonio Gutierrez Danton  
c/o CUAC  
Casilla 16  
Santiago 58  
CHILE

## London Calling

Friends,

Just a few observations about your last issue (Spring/Summer 2003). There was a big debate with Kevin Keating and NEFAC about the working class and unions, and we have a great deal to say about this. Indeed our book *All Power to the Imagination: Class Struggle in the Unions and the Petit-Bourgeoisie Fetish of Organizational Purism* is a counter to those who believe the unions are the enemy full stop, and can't be used at all...

We have things to say about 'Openly Classist' too (noticed you reviewed their pamphlet, *I Was A Working Class Anarchist*). It's all very well for Terry Morgan to complain about the state of the movement, but there are tremendous problems with 'Openly Classist'.

Firstly, it was set up by a self confessed former British secret service agent, Andy Anderson. Secondly, they advocate a class purism that doesn't exist in the real world, and have a very Stalinist approach. They neglect that class is a relationship and class positions do change especially in today's dynamic capitalism. Look at the precarious situation today's middle class and former middle class are in. Many stable finance jobs have been automated and with temporary contracts loyalty is no longer guaranteed. In short there are lots of people who become proletarianized, not

overnight, and it can take a long time if culture is considered. But 'Openly Classist' say these people are the enemy and would have a 'year zero' approach akin to Pol Pot with an ideological purity that destines them to total irrelevance.

And finally, as a concrete observation on Leeds Class War, it should be noted that Class War has changed beyond recognition from when Morgan was writing about. What was Leeds Class War left the organization during the high profile split in 1997, and New Yorkshire Class War has a class composition and ability Morgan would be proud of. In short there are no middle class people involved anymore. Other working class people entered Class War in the 1980s and still remain, it never being a blockage to the working class. Perhaps Morgan was too naive at the outset? Class culture is something Class War has always had at its heart, drinking (ooohhhh) being something very working class and somewhere we have organized. Most working class people continued this and other cultural stuff within Class War.

All the best,

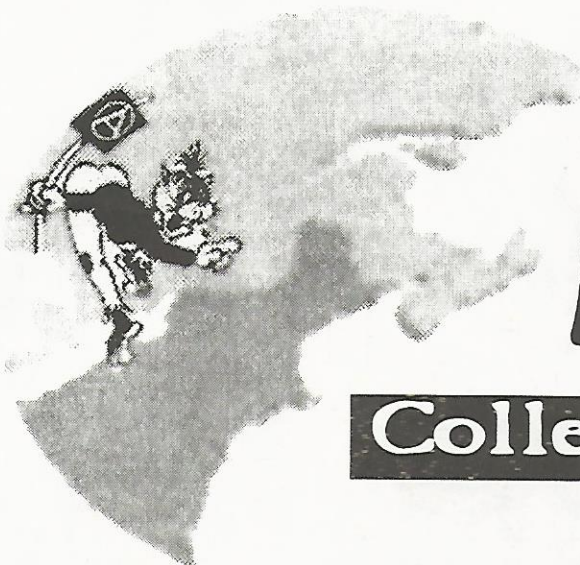
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